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ABSTRACT

This document is an anthology containing 33 articles originally published in the Boston Adult Literacy Initiative's newsletter, "All Write News" during the past 10 years. The articles were chosen to deal with a wide variety of topics, to balance theory and practice, to include materials from all the years, and to include articles that have not already been reprinted elsewhere. The following articles are included, organized in 11 categories: "Some Notes on the Politics of Literacy" (Gary Hicks); "To Speak Out, Read, Listen and Thrive" (Marty Duncan); "Literacy Work in Nicaragua and the U.S." (Barbara Neumann); "Of Canoes and Tall Ships: Some Thoughts on the Quincentenary" (Maria Gonzalez); "A View of Critical Thinking" (Barbara Neumann); "Linking Basic Skills and Job Training" (David Rosen); "Thoughts on 'Cultural Literacy'" (Steve Reuys); "Why I Stop in at Drop-In" (Christine James); "English into Action: Teaching ESL [English as a Second Language] and ABE [Adult Basic Education] through Drama" (Paula Ressler); "Learning from Students: A Video Project in Workplace ESL" (Robin Reale); "Breaking the Waiting List Logjam: Training Peer Tutors for ESL" (Roger Hooper); "Students and Teachers: Creating an Alliance" (Mattie Wheeler, Ada Cherry, Vicky Nunez, and Greg Leeds); "Participatory Education in Practice" (Lenore Balliro); "Programs Promote Student Involvement" (Eileen Barry, Tina Kluetmeier, Martha Merson, and Anna Taylor); "The On-going Debate in Literacy and Reading" (Steve Reuys); "Relevant Reading for Adult Students" (Nandi Attya); "Singing the Red Pen Blues: Ideas for Teaching Writing" (Gail Hart and Janet Stein); "Of Ducks, Experience, and Reading: A Bilingual ESL Project" (Frank Smith); "Sharing Strategies on ESL Survival Literacy" (Patricia Ryan); "Helping Students Become Storytellers" (Gregory A. Goodmacher); "Left Tongue/Right Tongue" (Tomas Mario Kalmar); "Thoughts on Survival ESL" (John Croes); "Shoes, Glorious Shoes: A Teaching Strategy" (Charlotte B. Knox); "Sharing Strategies: Math Word Problems" (Mary Jane Schmitt); "Why I Hate Story Problems" (David J. Rosen); "Math Notes: Did You Know...?" (Helen Jones); "For ABE Teachers and Students: Tests that Don't Defeat" (Greg Leeds); "An Experiment in Evaluation" (Andy Nash); "Performance Testing" (Shelley Ruocco); "Teachers Visiting Teachers: An Experiment in Classroom Observation" (Lenore Balliro); "At the Y: A Program-Based Staff Development Project" (Shelley Bertolino); "Adult Literacy Teacher Concerns" (Kimberly Gerould); and "Organizing an Adult Ed. Union" (Rhonda Seidman, Lisa Schwartz, and Barbara Neumann). (KC)

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Reflections

An Anthology of Selections from the *All Write News*, the Newsletter of the Adult Literacy Resource Institute

Published to Commemorate the Tenth Anniversary of the Boston Adult Literacy Initiative

June, 1993

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Reflections

An Anthology of Selections from the *All Write News*, the Newsletter of the Adult Literacy Resource Institute— Published to Commemorate the Tenth Anniversary of the Boston Adult Literacy Initiative

The Adult Literacy Resource Institute is a joint project of the University of Massachusetts/Boston and Roxbury Community College, funded primarily by the Massachusetts Higher Education Coordinating Council, the City of Boston's EDIC/Department of Jobs and Community Services, and the Massachusetts Department of Education/Bureau of Adult Education.

The A.L.R.I. was created in 1983 as part of the Boston Adult Literacy Initiative. It now also serves as the Greater Boston Regional Support Center for the state's SABES network (System for Adult Basic Education Support). Our address is 989 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston MA 02215; our phone number is (617) 782-8956.

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Introduction

The year 1993 marks the tenth anniversary of the Boston Adult Literacy Initiative, and the A.L.R.I.'s publication of this anthology of articles from our newsletter, the *All Write News*, is intended as part of the commemoration of this anniversary. The newsletter first appeared in July of 1984, acquired its name soon after, and has continued to be published on a bi-monthly basis ever since. A lot of interesting and useful articles have been printed here over the years, yet very few literacy practitioners in this area could have seen all of these fifty-some issues. So it seemed to us here at the A.L.R.I. and to others with whom we discussed the idea that assembling and publishing a collection of articles chosen from all these issues of the newsletter could be a valuable project and would certainly serve as a fitting part of the A.L.I. commemoration.

As with any anthology, the most difficult part of putting together this collection was selecting which articles to include. Very briefly, the process we used was as follows: All of the "eligible articles" were clipped out from each issue (up to and including the January/February 1993 issue) and placed under one of five general "topic headings." (We excluded all the short, usually unsigned, usually time-dependent informational pieces and announcements from consideration; virtually everything else was "eligible.") Each of these five sub-sets of articles was given to two different readers, who were asked to read each piece in their subset and to rate each one as to whether they would recommend including it in this collection. (Our ten courageous readers are listed on the cover page.) The recommendations were then assembled and reviewed by a smaller sub-committee of this group, which made the final selection of articles, based very much on the readers' recommendations. (Also, it later turned out that a few last-minute decisions had to be made by me due to space limitations.)

In addition to the readers' ratings, the final selection committee adopted a few policies to help guide the process. We agreed that the overall collection should:

- deal with a wide variety of topics and shouldn't have too many articles on any one topic;
- balance discussion of theory and practice;
- include, as much as possible, material from all the years during which the newsletter was published;
- represent a wide variety of authors, with no more than two articles by any one author; and
- include articles which have not already been reprinted elsewhere.

We also agreed to group the selected articles under a variety of topic headings as a way of bringing some order to this rather broad collection. These headings, however, and the grouping of particular articles under

them represent just one person's view (namely, mine) of how it might make sense to categorize these articles. It is therefore certain to be ideosyncratic—someone else might have chosen to arrange these articles in an entirely different way—and, indeed, I found myself strongly tempted to place many of them under other headings myself. In any case, don't take these organizational chapters too seriously; in fact, feel free to create your own.

With very few exceptions, the articles appear here exactly as they did when they were originally published. No attempt has been made to "update" any of the articles. (The only changes that have been made were to omit a few editorial notes and references that were no longer pertinent.) Consequently, some of the articles do contain anachronisms, and it is important to keep in mind the date of each article's original publication as you read through it. We do feel, however, that each article reprinted here remains relevant and meaningful to the field. (Indeed, in some cases, such as the articles on teacher concerns and worker organization, things have unfortunately not changed much at all.) It's also important to remember that the very brief descriptive statements about the authors are reprinted from the articles as well. (The year in which that piece originally appeared is included again after each biographical statement as a reminder.) Most of these statements are thus no longer correct, but they are included to give readers an idea of what each author was doing at the time the article was written.

Before ending this introduction, we would like to extend our gratitude to the members of our editorial committee, who volunteered their time for the essentially thankless task of helping us to assemble this collection. We would also like to thank all of you who have contributed material to the *All Write News* over the past years; we wish we could have included many more of your articles in this collection. And finally, we would like to encourage all of our readers to write for the newsletter at any time—maybe you'll even find your article included in another future anthology!

We hope you find this collection interesting and useful, and we would very much welcome any comments you may have concerning this publication.

—Steve Reuys

The Political Context of Literacy

Some Notes on the Politics of Literacy

By Gary Hicks

First published March 1987

On January 21, the Boston Adult Literacy Initiative presented a conference on "Literacy and Empowerment" for staff and students of the various Literacy Initiative programs. We invited any participants for whom the conference had prompted thoughts or reactions to write them up and submit them to the newsletter. —Ed.

I'm sitting here in front of this typewriter with all kinds of thoughts whirling about in my head, coming off of yesterday's literacy and empowerment conference. And I'm trying to integrate what I heard yesterday with my own autobiographical issues, which in the end are political. At least that is how I sum up my life history, which among other things is a story of integrating a struggle to read and write well with twenty-plus years of political activism.

Let me try and explain. It wasn't too long ago that to be black and able to read was to put oneself at risk, physically. It was considered uppity to be able to read and reason on the basis of what you understood. My pastor's grandmother, who died recently at the age of 100, never told anyone until nearly on her deathbed that she knew how to read. And she taught others how to read: by candlelight, in backwoods rural shacks, late at night. This so that the local white folks wouldn't find out that such subversion was taking place, the main text being that well-known red-Russian communist classic known as the Bible. My pastor's grandmother followed a tradition that went back to slavery times when it was a criminal offense for blacks to be learning how to read, and it was a jailable—and often lynchable—offense to be a teacher.

Nor was this confined to the South. As early as the 1830s, the good townspeople of (I think) Milford, Connecticut, jailed a white Quaker lady named Prudence Crandall and burned the schoolhouse in which she taught black children how to read, write and count. And even among Quakers, abolitionists and the like,

Prudence Crandall was an honorable exception to what passed for progressive politics at that time. Most white people who were anti-slavery for whatever reason somehow thought that our literacy wasn't as important as for us simply to go away: to Africa, Canada—anyplace but settle in New England, Ohio, New York or other places closer to home. Our black humanity was somehow great in the abstract, but downright frightening when it came to dealing with in-the-flesh human beings right in front of your face, faults, virtues and all. And here to live. To work, raise families. To also be no different from other human beings in showing our capacity for other than virtuous behavior (which somehow is always more clearly remembered).

John Brown, one of the more consistent white abolitionists of our country, understood this clearly. And his advocacy of literacy (he wasn't only a gun-slinging guerrilla) among black people—and for that matter everyone else—was always tied in with a need to get on with the very real tasks of holding down a job and seeing to it that kith and kin survived the very real forces—social and otherwise—that militated against the ability of black people to get over. His contemporary, Frederick Douglass, sharing Brown's sentiments, added some of his own. It wasn't enough to survive; it was necessary to take some historical responsibility for destroying a social order which had proven beyond a reasonable doubt that it was a drag on the ability of humanity to move forward. I'm speaking of slavery, which, before it ended in its property-owning form, sucked the nation into a civil war that took upwards of half a million lives. And when the dust cleared, there were four million ex-slaves needing literacy, forty acres, a mule, political power, and—reality being what it was (and is?)—some guns. Both John Brown and Frederick Douglass understood the political stakes of literacy, perhaps if for no other reason than that both of these men—under differing circumstances and for different reasons—were self-taught.

Now it seems that some things never change down through history. For example, I have in my memory an old United/Associated/Reuters press agency photo (was it taken in 1982? 1983? earlier?) of an Afghani so-called freedom fighter, captured AK-47 Soviet rifle in hand, blowing away a women lying on the ground. The subtitle underneath the photo said that she was a communist schoolteacher. Whatever that means.

I have in front of me some notes taken from an interview with literacy workers in Nicaragua. And the workers are telling the woman doing the interviewing (a North American literacy teacher from Boston) that literacy teachers are among the top priority targets of the contras, along with health care workers.

And I remember all the freedom schools in Mississippi that were burnt to the ground in the 1960s. And the literacy volunteers of our own civil rights movement, shot at, jailed, beaten. Or having the misfortune to have been named Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, James Chaney. Literacy volunteers, two whites, one black. Fresh from an orientation meeting at Oberlin College for the Mississippi Summer Project, 1964. It's said that they didn't even have time to unpack their suitcases. And of course came the government excuses. That there wasn't much they could do, that it was out of their jurisdiction. No jurisdiction over U.S. citizens needing protection. But somehow the jurisdiction was found to send troops ten thousand miles over the ocean to seek out and destroy people even suspected of being communist—whatever that means!—guerrillas, government officials, tax collectors, and-once again, folks—literacy workers.

Some things never change. Or rather, they do but only when despite all of the murder, the rape, the destruction, the violation of humanity—the people win. And they then get to read like there's no tomorrow. And indeed there isn't if they don't read. And talk about what they read. And what it has to do with anything. Like living. And coming up with some interesting conclusions about how to live better without rich people. Without death squads. Without professionals of all types throwing about all kinds of buzzwords. And reading is at the center of it all. A communist plot, this literacy. After all, who else would unleash such atomic energy upon the world's peoples? The church? Sometimes, depending who had the Bible and what they thought about it. The liberals? Only up to the point that the people started reading and writing and thinking things that just didn't fit in with what a good liberal education was all about. The rich? Sometimes in a fit of concern about the social consequences of illiteracy, they will forget that literacy is one of the shovels to be used by the gravediggers of their social order. But when they remember, and literacy campaigns are out of hand—then come the cutbacks in funding, come the persecutions of teachers for being too damned effective, i.e., really getting folks to read. And at a certain point, come the guns in the hands of the vigilantes. And those who want to continue to teach will now have to learn to become literate in the ways of the knock-down, drag-out. Harassment of all types, imprisonment, torture, murder. In this country, like in any other, these are the risks that may be involved in taking literacy seriously.

Gary Hicks teaches English and math at the Harriet Tubman House in the South End. (1987)

To Speak Out, Read, Listen and Thrive

By Marty Duncan

First published May 1987

I am writing in support of two articles which appeared in the March, 1987, *All Write News:* "Some Notes on the Politics of Literacy" and "Yes to Adult Literacy, No to 'Up to Poverty'??" While considering my response, I examined the main points of the articles and began to write a kind of letter to the editor. Then, I spent two days with a fine group of women in the first of the "Taking the Long View" counseling workshops, discussing the worlds in which we live and work. Emerging from this experience, I feel a renewed sense of what is important about literacy and welfare rights work. Now, I would like to describe the experiences of people, to tell their stories (much better told in their own words, of course). I would like to document the evidence that it is absurd to increase funding to literacy programs while refusing to raise welfare payments and that, indeed, there are risks involved in "taking literacy seriously."

Many people think that it would be best for women on AFDC, their families, society as a whole, and the economy if the women would get off welfare as quickly as possible. The current punitive trend is to coerce people into low-wage jobs and short-term training programs. This ensures their continued impoverishment. Those of us who believe that everyone has the right to develop to the fullest, the right to higher education, do not support this "solution."

There is an assumption that women want to stay on welfare, that they do not want to work. Here is a profile of a woman on AFDC and a *partial* list of her responsibilities, time commitments, and accomplishments: Louise is the mother of an eight-year-old daughter. When she was growing up, she had primary responsibility for helping her seven brothers and sisters with their homework. She also helped her parents with reading and writing.

Responsibilities and Time Commitments	*Accomplishments*
Full care of 8-year old child; 24 hours a day.	The child is healthy, bright, motivated, sensitive and has a strong sense of herself.
College program (course work, homework, meetings with advisors); 1/2-1/4 time.	1/3 of the program completed.
Community Teaching Assistant—stipend position (class participation, staff meetings, student meetings, outreach and follow-up, class planning, co-teaching, tutoring, counseling); 20 hrs/week.	Fine rapport with students. Several students staying in program through counseling efforts. Clear communication, teaching, collaboration, facilitation skills.
Tenants' Organization (representation on various committees); several hours a month.	Mediation of disputes. Problem-solving in the community.
Church; weekly and on-going commitment.	Spiritual strength.
Extended family support; on-going, "on call."	Solid sense of self and family. Practical assistance.
Reporting to Welfare; determined by the department.	Survival.

If this woman says, "I am exceptional," (which she is—she has many fine qualities which are uniquely her own) people will say. "Well, she's only one out of a hundred. Most welfare mothers sit home and collect their checks." And if she says, "I am like many other women on AFDC," (which she is—every "welfare mother" I have met is hardworking and amazingly resourceful) people will say, "Well, then, why do we have to increase their benefits? They're doing fine the way they are."

Take one good, human look at what this woman is doing and attempting to do and answer this: If she is supposed to help herself, her family and society by getting off welfare quickly, tell me *how* she can do it.

Tell me *how* she can maintain the quality of life she is making a stupendous effort to maintain. Finding the time to do everything is only one aspect of the situation. The struggle that people have to engage in every minute of every day to overcome the damage to self-esteem, delivered blow by blow by a society that refuses to acknowledge the worth of the majority of people in this country, is a superhuman, sometimes all-consuming endeavor. Did you ever try to work or study with even *one* small problem on your mind?

Many people in adult education programs deeply appreciate volunteers. We appreciate help and support and the opportunity for people from all backgrounds to meet and work together. The *way* people come together is crucial.

As a former volunteer coordinator, who added this responsibility to an already more than full-time teaching and counseling role, I can speak to the need for resources to coordinate volunteers. Yet, we cannot set aside the concerns I have been outlining and say, "Oh great! We have this wonderful group of volunteers to help us work on reading, writing, math and English as a Second Language." Every student in every program comes with a constellation of hopes, fears, responsibilities, goals and accomplishments. When people come together in a learning situation, *understanding* must develop among all participants. It must be encouraged and cultivated. Bridges must be built. While all may share in this responsibility, effective coordination is the key. Handling the logistics alone—scheduling, finding the most effective arrangements, orientation—is challenging. There is merit in supporting the on-going efforts to effectively integrate volunteers into learning centers.

It does not make sense, however, to say to people, "We support volunteer efforts to help you read, write or learn English, but we do not support your efforts to feed, clothe and house your family."

* * * * * *

Let's talk about learning English. Let's talk about taking English learning seriously. In this context, as in the context of the "Politics of Literacy" article, the risks, the dangers, are immediate. To learn English, to become bilingual while maintaining one's own culture in this society, is to put oneself at risk. With the new immigration laws, a whole new wave of people who are "here to live, to work and raise families," are (even more than before) subject to "harassment of all types." So, for some people, even to come to classes is to put themselves at risk.

Like the courageous woman who concealed her ability to read and taught others "by candlelight, in backwoods shacks, late at night," there are courageous people coming from other countries, with bright hopes, with aspirations:

There is a woman in her early twenties, the mother of two, who arrived from Nicaragua four months ago. She has become proficient in English in that short time by immersing herself in television, newspapers and radio and attending English classes. Her dream is to learn at least six languages. Why? Because she wants to study human relations. She wants to help people.

There is a twenty-year-old woman who had to leave El Salvador because of the war. She worked with churches in San Salvador. She wants to be a painter. She feels that this is the best way to express what her country is suffering.

There is a sixty-six-year-old woman who was born in Syria and lived in Venezuela for 35 years. She knows four and a half languages, she says. She is fluent in Arabic, Turkish, Spanish, and French and she is learning English.

There is a twenty-year-old man from Guatemala who writes about a woman from his country: "...she decided to come to the United States to try to help her children. She had had a lot of trouble to come to this country.

"She left from Guatemala with 800.00 quetzales and started her trip, but in the way she needed to sell her body to continue her trip, because she didn't have enough money, and she was crying when she told me how she came, but she is working in a farm and she is sending money to her mother that takes care her children; but she was telling me that she needs to work, almost 16 hours a day to get enough money for food, clothes, and rent for the children and mother.

"She tells me that sometimes she cry when she is working but she try to be strong and remember her family and continue fighting with her own heart..."

And there are countless others we have not met, who have not yet spoken.

I want to join with the great Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, in saying: "I don't want anyone to ever again...arrest and deport someone else. I want everyone to go in and come out of City Hall smiling. I want... everyone to be able to speak out, read, listen, thrive."

Marty Duncan is an ABE teacher at the Jackson/ Mann Community School in Allston. (1987)

LITERACY WORK IN NICARAGUA AND THE U.S.

By Barbara Neumann

First published February 1986

Can education have a revolutionary forcefulness when practiced outside a revolutionary context? Is literacy an individually realized "goal" or a social "process"? Are the most effective literacy teachers professional educators...or other literacy students? Where can teachers who are committed to social change, yet experience isolation in their teaching situations, find support, inspiration, and a forum for developing collective action?

These are some of the questions that emerged when Eduardo Baez, Director of Adult Popular Education in Nicaragua, met with "estudiantes, educatores, y outras personas interesadas" for a day-long provocative discussion of Boston-Nicaraguan "literacy connections." The event began with a morning session conducted in Spanish at Centro Presente in Cambridge, then moved to the UMass Downtown Campus where Baez continued his presentation in English and interest groups convened to discuss implications of the Nicaraguan adult popular education movement for Boston literacy workers. A spirit of energetic reflection infused the day's non-stop conversations *(especially* those which took place outside the formal sessions, during lunch, coffee breaks, etc.). Dissimilar as the political, cultural, and economic realities of Boston (the U.S.) and Nicaragua are, there is a good deal of relevance to be found in our disparate experience, and many "clicks" (!) of identification.

For example: In Nicaragua the essential framework for adult education is the collective. Unlike the adult learning centers of the United States, Nicaraguan collectives are not dependent on the physical references of buildings and classrooms; a collective "happens whenever a group of people get together to learn." Collectives are informal, and teachers are more likely than not students themselves. Baez informed us that there are 17,000-20,000 popular education teachers in Nicaragua. Of these, approximately 70% are *learning* at a somewhat higher level than that at which they are *teaching.* (E.g., an adult student reading at a fourth grade level may be teaching another reading at a first grade level.) Given the dramatic success of Nicaragua's literacy campaign, we may pause to ask ourselves what this implies about effective teaching. The intense attachment to professional roles felt by adult educators here, I believe, constrains our efforts to envision (and therefore practice) a truly liberatory education. Should we not look at the subtle as well as the blatant perpetuation of classism? Who (and what) do we mean (and suggest) when we say "teacher"?

Lest we tend to romanticize the Nicaraguan literacy campaign, we were reminded that the system contains contradictions familiar to most of us. Baez pointed out that while informality exists in the collectives, the structure is bureaucratic. "For example," he continued, "BUDGET REALITIES intervened." (Laughter all around. How true.) The need to evaluate programs, determine priorities, and make funding decisions persists even across national/political boundaries.

Adult popular education in Nicaragua is an important facet of the revolution. Illiteracy is viewed as a structural not an individual problem. Furthermore, the revolutionary context implies a dynamic atmosphere: "To eradicate illiteracy we must eradicate the *process* of illiteracy...We had to be able to insurrect people, we had to shake people from their passivity." A definition of literacy as social process is at odds with prevalent notions in the U.S. where the tendency is to treat literacy as a product. Learning encapsulated in competencies, contracts specifying outcomes, individualized instruction—in the name of student self-determination these widely accepted features of "sound" adult education practice may instead function as a kind of solitary confinement. In isolation, mired in paperwork, and with quick-fix prescriptions in hand, students—and teachers—are unlikely insurrectionists.

So, what do we mean by "the politics of literacy"? Our dialog with Eduardo Baez helped many of us to focus on that question with a fresh awareness. We owe it to ourselves to pursue the discussion begun on Saturday, December 7. A collective decision to do just that led to a follow-up meeting in late January and early February.

Some of the guiding principles of the Nicaraguan adult popular education movement may indeed help us to develop our own politics of literacy. That knowledge means people understanding the world in order to transform it; that the learning process is social, not just individual; and that popular education must be about the experience of the people—"These principles are a safeguard..." (Eduardo's face is expressive, his gestures emphatic) "...that the revolution will always be a

democratic revolution."

(For more information on literacy in Nicaragua, see: Valerie Miller, *Between Struggle and Hope* (West View Press, 1985).

Barbara Neumann was, until recently, director of the adult education program at the Jackson/Mann Community School in Allston. (1986)

Of Canoes and Tall Ships: Some Thoughts on the Quincentenary

By Maria González

First published November 1992

This summer I witnessed the following scene between my friend and her 11-year old son, Jamie. Jamie asked her what the Quincentenary was. Always alert to teaching possibilities for her children, she told him that it referred to the 500th anniversary of Columbus' landing in this hemisphere. Did he remember who Columbus was? Sure, he answered, Columbus discovered America. My friend paused as she searched for the right words....Well, son, not exactly....But Jamie, the good student that he is, was sure he knew the answer....I know, I know, ma—the Pilgrims came first.

We can dismiss this anecdote as that of an 11-year old getting historical facts mixed up, but it is also true that there are a lot of us adults who got the facts mixed up at an early age and have not always had the opportunity to reexamine the history we were taught in school. Perhaps a small, but revealing example is the way in which many Americans believe that Columbus actually set foot in what is now the United States. I think that is so partly because the big print in the history textbooks tends to read that Columbus discovered America (read U.S.A.) and only the little print specifies exactly where. The Columbus holiday every October also hammers into everyone's mind that "Columbus discovered America" (i.e., the United States). For many North Americans, this might be akin to a "little white lie," but to our neighbors to the south it is yet another instance of U.S. arrogance and the need of this country to assert its dominance in the hemisphere. Historian Howard Zinn in a recent talk traced the Columbus holiday back to the late 19th century, a period that marked the beginning of a very deliberate policy of expansionism by the U.S. government. To claim direct "discovery" by Columbus, in my view, became a public relations ploy to justify U.S. intervention in the rest of the Americas.

Who gets to write history and what gets said or highlighted are just a couple of the questions many of us are grappling with in the midst of the big Columbus hoopla. As educators, we feel the responsibility of covering the history that tends to be in the texts, yet do not want to teach myths as truth. Alan Singer, a social studies teacher in the New York City public schools, writes that "Democratic values demand honest history." ("The Promise of Multiculturalism," *Rethinking Schools*, May/June '92). He advocates for social studies curricula that teach "history from the bottom up...(focusing) on the people—workers, women, ethnic minorities, immigrants—who built the nation....Social history does not have to look for heroes to promote; its exploration of the U.S. is based on the notion that many people contributed to making the nation."

Such a basic democratic view of history is menacing to some very powerful forces in this country. One is the Committee of Scholars in Defense of History, which claims as members such notables as Arthur Schlesinger and Diane Ravitch. They have written numerous statements attacking efforts by teachers to develop social studies curricula that are inclusive of histories other than Europe's and which challenge traditional portrayals of figures like Christopher Columbus. The Committee has accused those educators and a few historians of wanting to "rewrite" history to appease special interest groups but with nary a word

about their own political motivations in maintaining the status quo. It seems that if they're so intent on maintaining historical integrity, then they should celebrate and not deplore the inclusion in school texts of undeniable historical truths, such as the fact that George Washington was a slaveholder and that the Civil War was not really fought to free the African captives.

The open disclosure of this information should not diminish the importance of historical figures and events, for better or worse. It provides not only understanding of the people and their times but how they relate to the present. Another example of a historical figure who tends to be portrayed as one-dimensional is Father Bartolomeo de Las Casas. He was an influential priest who transcribed Columbus' diary but is best know in Latin American as "el defensor" of the Indians. His letters reveal, however, that his defense of Indians was rooted in the belief that they were physically weak as well as too "innocent" to make suitable slaves. For this, he encouraged the Spanish crown to import African slaves into the new colonies instead. His beliefs that Africans were physically superior and accustomed to hard work in the hot sun were common rationalizations at the time for slavery. Las Casas recanted his views towards the end of his life, but a review of his earlier beliefs, well-documented in his extensive correspondence, provides pertinent insights into 15th century Europe. Their view of brown and black people tended to vacillate between that of "noble savage" and "ferocious barbarians" (sic) (A. Montenegro-Gonzalez, *Historia de America*, Editorial Norma, Colombia, 1984, p. 81). These racist stereotypes cannot be dismissed as irrelevant in our times when we consider an event such as the brutal beating of Rodney King by the Los Angeles Police Department. The policeman's recorded comment about "gorillas in our midst" can be traced to the same racist origins.

The riots in L.A. were another reason why, to me, the Boston Tall Ships Celebration missed the boat by ignoring what the sight of those tall masts meant to natives of these lands in 1492 and beyond. How ironic that among the throngs of people greeting the tall ships, hardly a black, brown, yellow, or shades-in-between face was seen. Many people from Boston's communities of color stayed away in protest, not because folks dispute the historical fact that a man such as Columbus existed but because their experiences were ignored. What a missed opportunity to examine all of the history associated with those beautiful vessels. Not just the stories of those who manned them, but of the captives held in the ships' holds and the natives who rode the canoes that met them. I strongly believe that until we honor the memory of those who have been ignored in this history of conquest and resistance, their ghosts will continue to haunt us for five hundred more years. That's a lot of 11-year olds getting the facts "mixed up" about such an important event as the origin of our nation.

A colleague recently reminded me of a favorite saying of Mel King, a leader and political activist in Boston's African-American community. He used to say as he went around town trying to unite different communities, "We might have come on different ships, but we're all in the same boat now." I can't think of a more appropriate way to describe where we are nationally, and globally, 500 years after October 12, 1492.

Maria González is the SABES Coordinator at the A.L.R.I. (1992)

Teaching & Learning: General Contexts

A View of Critical Thinking

By Barbara Neumann

First published March 1988

Participants in A.L.R.I.'s Critical Thinking Project have been working together since last spring to make of our group a teaching/learning community which supports the development of a creative, critical pedagogy. An important aspect of this process has been the regular discussion of our teaching practice and analysis of curriculum in the context of actual classroom experience. We examine our assumptions about education—from the self-identified perspective of being both students and teachers, as well as from the vantage point of theory. We describe what happens in our classes and help each other think of ways to apply what we learn in a given circumstance to our ongoing practice. This is a glimpse of what I mean:

Recently, Ana Zambrano (who teaches ESL at the Jackson/Mann Community School) wanted to introduce the theme of "immigration" in her class. A number of students had been coming to her individually to discuss their situations with respect to the new immigration law. She realized that despite their shared concerns most people were reluctant to bring up the subject of amnesty and the new immigration law in class. While she was glad to advise them and help them access needed legal services, she also knew that students had a lot to learn from each other, and that they would be better equipped to address specific problems if they had a frame of reference that extended beyond their own, their family's and close friends' recent experience.

So she set about developing a lesson which had the intent of:

- expanding people's knowledge of U.S. immigrant history
- generating discussion and critical analysis of government immigration policy
- developing practical solutions to immediate problems and concerns (i.e., developing resources, skills, and an informational base for decision-making)
- creating a supportive environment for discussion of personally difficult and/or politically sensitive issues
- practicing and improving oral language and lit-

eracy skills.

Ana chose a reading which she thought would open up discussion and lead to critical reflection on several important issues. She selected a passage from *The Woman Warrior* and introduced it to the class in a way that prompted active, immediate engagement with the text. The class began with each student receiving an envelope containing slips of paper which looked something like this:

> "Don't tell," advised my parents. "Don't go to San Francisco until they leave."

> "No, they won't. They're promising that nobody is going to go to jail or get deported. They'll give you citizenship as a reward for turning yourself in, for your honesty."

> Lie to Americans. Tell them you were born during the San Francisco earthquake.

> fake papers, to come to the city and get their files straightened out. The immigrants discussed whether

> wan? I've never been to Hong Kong or Taiwan. The Big Six? Where?" We don't belong anywhere since the Revolution. The old China has disappeared while we've been away.

> "Don't be a fool," somebody else would say. "It's a trap. You go in there saying you want to straighten out your papers, they'll deport you."

> or not to turn themselves in. "We might as well," somebody would say. "Then we'd have our citizenship for real."

> "Don't you believe it. So-and-so trusted them, and he was deported. They deported his children too."
> "Where can they send us now? Hong Kong? Tai-

> ters in the San Francisco or Sacramento Chinatown to urge wetbacks and stowaways, anybody here on

> Occasionally the rumor went about that the United States immigration authorities had set up headquar-

Students worked in small groups to arrange the excerpt fragments in correct sequence. Because the passage had been cut differently for each group, more than one logically coherent ordering of the pieces was possible. Reading the organized passages aloud led to extensive discussion of which versions made sense and why—a lively, student-directed grammar lesson. (Ana had also prepared supplemental grammar exercises as a follow-up/homework activity).

Next, the class discussed the reading. Ana presented comprehension questions that required students to draw upon context clues for understanding—e.g., When did this happen? How do you know? She also posed questions which allowed the insertion of historical information—e.g., What revolution is being referred to in the story? As discussion of the reading proceeded, students began talking about current realities for immigrants and refugees and shared questions they had about their own status under the new law. Clear, pressing concerns surfaced. A single line of text—"They'll give you citizenship as a reward..for your honesty."—sparked intense debate.

Then, students wrote on the question: What is the difference between then and now? The writing assignment helped people to focus both their questions and their emerging analysis of government policies. Finally, the class prepared questions for a workshop on the New Immigration Law that was to take place at the Community School the following week.

* * * * * *

When Ana presented this "lesson" to our Critical Thinking group, our experience paralleled that of her class. We moved through the activities and questions, and we found ourselves in deep discussion. We compared our experiences of teaching and studying about immigration in different settings—in a racially and ethnically diverse ABE classroom, in a multi-cultural ESL class, in a class comprised entirely of Latina women, etc. Through our group discussion, we identified additional possibilities for teaching and advocacy. And we "thought critically" about the political choices we make (as teachers, counselors, friends) in response to immigration law and public policy. We found ourselves addressing far-reaching types of issues: from pedagogy (using readings to stimulate discussion and introduce ideas, "timing" the introduction of a theme), to ethics (grappling with questions of trust, risk, "legalism vs. cynicism"), to activism (*dealing* with problems vs. making referrals, mobilizing support, using informal networks).

As has been the case throughout the life of this project, we saw the impossibility of interpreting critical thinking as a linear or neatly ordered process. We continue to learn from each other; we try to enlarge our

experience, so as to deepen our understanding of the critical/social issues around which much of our teaching is organized. We use each other as resources, and work at developing broader community connections. This flexible and simple approach to "critical thinking" allows us to struggle through complex issues without becoming mired in rhetoric.

Barbara Neumann is Coordinator of the Critical Thinking Project at the A.L.R.I. (1988)

Linking Basic Skills and Job Training

By David Rosen

First published December 1985

In October, when the Boston Network for Alternative and Adult Education polled members to determine the highest priority topics this year, "Linking Job Training to Basic Education" was head, shoulders, and top hat above the rest. Most likely this is because BostonWorks has focused our attention on "linkage," the forging of links in the chain of education, training, and employment. There is a question in many teachers' minds, however, as to whether this will be chain to pull students' anchors up and get them sailing, or one to shackle them with learning which is too limited and too job-specific. Many also wonder if this will mean that funding for broad education which leads to critical thinking, good written communication, high school diplomas or G.E.D.'s, and then college, will now be channelled to more limited vocational basic skills.

For adults who can get a good general education first, before job training and employment, alternative high school diploma and G.E.D. preparation programs make good sense. For those who have only a few months of economic assistance before they must work, however, or for those who for other reasons must get work as soon as possible, a general education now may not be possible. They may have only enough time for skills training, or for a combination of *short-term*, pre-vocational basic skills and training.

Does this mean that they cannot get a general education at all? Certainly not. After training, and once settled in a job, they can continue their education at night or on weekends, as thousands of others are doing right now. Moreover, the taste of basic skills learning before training may whet their appetites for more learning; and succeeding in pre-vocational basic skills may convince those who doubted it that they can, indeed, learn in a classroom.

The most persuasive argument for vocationally targetted basic skills, however, is that the 30-60% of the applicants who are turned away from vocational training programs in Boston each year because they lack basic skills do not, by and large, go to adult basic education programs to get them. Having screwed their courage to the sticking point, and then having failed in their attempt to better themselves, most do not try again. And those who do knock at the doors of adult basic education are frequently discouraged when they learn months or years of basic education are ahead before training and the job they want. So, they settle for less, for low-paying, dead-end, unskilled jobs.

If you agree that there is a need for vocational basic skills leading to job training, provided that students also have opportunities to go on for more general education after training, you may ask what a system which links them should look like. Briefly, like this:

• *Training programs* need to define in specific, measurable terms what basic skills are needed to enter and succeed in each training area: not "eighth grade level skills in..." but specifically, what basic skills are needed for that training program: fractions? decimals? linear measurement? estimation skills? reading charts or tables? using a glossary? reading a road map? writing a purchase order? filling out a job application form?

• *Basic skills programs* need to have a curriculum

able to address the widest range of basic skills deficiencies, but they must be willing and able to tailor that curriculum so it fits each student's particular needs for entering a specific training program, as a glove fits a hand. The learning needs to be open-entry/open-exit, individually-paced, and short-term, no longer than four months. (Students who need more time than this probably need a more basic—and general—education program.)

• *Referral* from training assessment to basic skills "brush-up," and then back to enter the training program (or in some cases a different training program), needs to be thorough so that those referred get to the basic skills remediation they need. This is more likely to happen if training and brush up are in the same agency, but if the referrals out are carefully followed-up, they can be successful. To make good referrals, vocational counselors need up-to-date, accurate, complete information on education programs, and teachers need the same for training programs. This information must be collected centrally, updated at least monthly, and rapidly disseminated to all programs. A computerized information system, where such information is immediately accessible by telephone to a central place with a computer, is ideal. A rapid-turnaround, paper-based system is next best.

• The *curriculum* for basic skills programs needs to include the widest range of measurably-defined reading, writing, math, listening, and study skills. It needs to be very specific, objectives-based, and common to *all* the basic skills brush-up programs in the city.

• From this all-inclusive, widely-shared basic skills curriculum (a set of basic skills learning objectives), *entry tests* need to be created for each training program. Each test must completely and accurately measure the basic skills needed to enter and succeed in *that* training program. The test must fit the training program like a hand-tailored suit, but the cloth it is cut from must be the same yards-long broadcloth found in every brush-up center.

• Thus, a student is tested at a training program for the basic skills needed in that training. If s/he does not meet the standards, s/he is sent to a basic skills brush-up center to work on just those learning objectives which the test shows s/he needs in order to succeed in training. When ready, s/he is re-tested on the same objectives (with different test items, of course), and if s/he then demonstrates mastery, s/he enters training at the next available opportunity.

• Such a system capitalizes on the original *motivation*, offering the hope—delayed only by weeks or a few months—of entering training, and those who might have given up their dreams have a chance of realizing them.

David Rosen is Education Director at Jobs for Youth/Boston and Chair of the Boston Network for Alternative and Adult Education. (1985)

THOUGHTS ON *CULTURAL LITERACY*

By Steve Reuys

First published September 1987

Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know, by E. D. Hirsch, Jr., (Houghton Mifflin: 1987) is the type of book that the media and the "pop ed" gurus are certain to love, and we may be hearing about it for some time. It has one central idea that can be easily stated in a few sentences, and it contains, as promised, an extensive list of those things "every American needs to know." In its affinity to "Trivial Pursuit" and to game shows such as "Jeopardy," such a list should make this book perfect grist for the daytime talk show mills. But the book does deal with some serious concerns that definitely relate to adult literacy and adult basic education, even though Hirsch frames his argument solely in terms of children's education. Also, in addition to "literacy," Hirsch's ideas relate to a number of other current issues (such as the new "English only" movement, for example). For these and other reasons, Hirsch's book needs to be considered and responded to by adult educators. This review attempts to present some of my own thoughts that were prompted by reading this book, but first let

me begin with a brief summary of Hirsch's position.

Hirsch, who is a professor of English at the University of Virginia, basically argues that we in the United States have lost the ability to communicate with one another because as individuals we lack the common body of knowledge (historical, geographic, artistic, scientific, etc.) that each of us should possess. That is, we are not "culturally literate." According to Hirsch, since so much of what is written presupposes this background information on the part of the reader, a student who does not have all this knowledge is unable to understand much of what she/he is reading. The schools have created the problem by getting away from the teaching of specific information and must now adopt a new curricular approach that is structured around the teaching of this body of cultural knowledge.

And in the last part of the book, Hirsch, in fact, presents a 63-page list consisting of the roughly 4400 items that he and a coupie of colleagues from the University of Virginia have suggested constitute this body of requisite knowledge that all literate adults should possess. This list begins with a few dates, then moves alphabetically from "abbreviation," "abolitionism," and "abominable snowman" through to "Emile Zola," "zoning," and "Zurich." They are also developing a much larger work, which they are calling a "dictionary" and which will contain entries indicating *what* it is we should all know about each item on the list. Each of us would probably quarrel with individual items on their list (if indeed anyone has the determination to read through it completely), but quibbling over particular items does not address the more fundamental aspects of Hirsch's argument.

I guess my first concern about the book is with a certain lack of clarity surrounding Hirsch's use of the term "cultural literacy." On the one hand, he appears to be using the term in a sense that is analogous to the term "computer-literacy" and where the emphasis in on the possession of basic knowledge of the national culture. On the other hand, he seems to shift the focus to actual print "literacy" (that is, reading) saying that the development of reading ability is largely dependent on the acquiring of a mental storehouse of "cultural" background knowledge.

In a parallel sense, Hirsch really appears to be attempting to make two different points, although he never separates or identifies the issues in this way. One argument is that all this basic knowledge is important to have, in and of itself, and that currently people have far too little of it. This, of course, is not a new complaint; "the kids aren't learning enough" has been a common cry aimed for years at schools from elementary grades on up to college. His second argument, related though different, is that increasing amounts of cultural knowledge is necessary background material as children (and presumably adults as well) learn to read, and that the lack of this background information is the major cause of children's difficulties with reading. This *is* something of a new claim, but one which I do not feel his evidence adequately proves.

Hirsch, however, is not at all guarded in his claims for the importance of cultural literacy, as the following quotes indicate:

> "Cultural literacy constitutes the only sure avenue of opportunity for disadvantaged children, the only reliable way of combatting the social determinism that now condemns them to remain in the same social and educational condition as their parents."
>
> "Only by piling up specific, communally shared information can children learn to participate in complex cooperative activities with other members of their community."
>
> "Only by accumulating shared symbols, and the shared information that the symbols represent, can we learn to communicate effectively with one another in our national community."
>
> "...only a few hundred pages of information stand between the literate and the illiterate, between dependence and autonomy."

In these rather sweeping generalizations that portray cultural literacy as truly our "only" hope, Hirsch seems to dismiss a whole range of other considerations. There is *some* merit to his case, but *my* openness at least was certainly undermined by his apparent unwillingness to consider other possibilities.

Hirsch contradicts or, more often, ignores the work of a large number of other educational theorists. For example, his approach, which emphasizes depositing in all students a certain compendium of knowledge, comes about as close to the "banking model" of education decried by Paulo Freire as any approach possibly could. And the idea of drawing upon students' own experiences and urging them to explore the reality of their own lives, promoted by Freire and others, is nowhere in sight.

He claims that the reading skills of elementary grade children "begin to diverge according to socioeconomic status, chiefly because low-income pupils lack elementary cultural knowledge." There is quite probably *some* level of truth to this, but there are certainly other factors as well. Shirley Brice Heath, for example, has suggested an alternative explanation for this divergence in school performance that emphasizes the differing degrees of "fit" between the roles and uses

of language in various racially, culturally, or class-defined communities and those expected by teachers and schools. And socio-economic status has important ramifications other than simply the "lack of elementary cultural knowledge," such as access to books and other reading material, or the generational connection whereby children are more likely to read if their parents do.

And his understanding of multicultural education appears very limited. He allows that multicultural education is valuable because it promotes tolerance and a sense of perspective on "*our own* traditions and values" (emphasis added), as if to say that all this stuff about other cultures is okay, but it isn't really "ours," that it's foreign to our traditional "national culture" which should be fine for everyone. In stating that multicultural education "should not be allowed to supplant our children's mastery of American literate culture," he thus ignores one of the basic tenets of multicultural education, namely that children in fact learn best in an environment that respects and reflects them and their own cultural backgrounds. The argument can easily be made that our children's problems with reading and with schooling in general may be due to too little, rather than too much, multicultural content.

Another major difficulty I had with the book was that, although a number of the pieces of Hirsch's argument are tough to quarrel with, it's not at all clear how they fit together or that they even belong to the same puzzle. Again, let me mention some examples.

When Hirsch brings forward data attesting to the lack of basic knowledge on the part of many people (such as awareness of who Thomas Jefferson was or the fact that Latin is not the language of Latin America), it would be hard to dispute these findings or, worse yet, to argue in favor of ignorance. Children and adults do need to learn more about our world, about their world, but educators certainly would disagree as to the causes of and possible solutions to the problem. One can acknowledge this need without necessarily seeing Hirsch's recommendations as *the* answer to it.

He draws from psychological research and the "schema" theory of how people read to reach the not-so-startling conclusion that we read better (i.e., understand more) when we have a context in which to place what we're reading, when we have some prior background knowledge about the subject. The importance of the prior knowledge that a reader can bring to any material is undeniable. But then to draw the conclusion that the reading problems of students are *primarily* due to a lack of background information regarding history, geography, etc. and that *the major* step that can be taken to improve the reading abilities of people in this country is to teach all kids enormous quantities of information drawn from our "national culture"—that seems to me a very large leap that is not justified by the evidence presented. He claims that "what distinguishes good readers from poor ones is simply the possession of a lot of diverse task-specific information." Can it really be that simple?

He argues that many societies have traditionally passed along their culture from generation to generation by having children memorize a body of knowledge, but he neglects to say that this is most common in non-literate cultures where memory is a necessary alternative to writing as a means of preserving information.

And he says that "young children enjoy absorbing formulaic knowledge," and he points out how kids can memorize large amounts of information about sports without benefit of formal avenues by which that information is inculcated." But isn't that the point? Children will often learn and memorize information about what interests them, but one can't necessarily conclude from this that children will memorize and retain whatever arbitrary array of information is presented to them.

Another problem with his argument is that in places he seems to be simply misinterpreting the evidence he presents. For example, Hirsch blames the sorry state of the schools on the supremacy of "formalistic" educational theory, the ideas of John Dewey and others who emphasized the developing of reading, writing, and thinking skills using a wide variety of content and material, rather than the imparting of a specific body of facts. This change came about early in this century, yet Hirsch uses reported declines in the abilities of students between 1970 and 1980 as evidence in his original statement of the problem. If the ascendency of the formalist approach to education were truly to blame, why did the effects of this change not become most pronounced until over 50 years later? Similarly, he argues against the current emphasis on the teaching of critical thinking skills as being the latest incarnation of educational formalism to oppose the teaching of "mere facts." Yet one of the examples he uses to argue for the necessity of shared knowledge (an experiment which asks students to describe drawings of various shapes to one another) could, in my view, be seen as involving the need for critical thinking or problem-solving as much as it does the need for shared knowledge.

Now, despite all these objections there is some value in Hirsch's ideas. For instance, in arguing for what amounts to a strong *academic* education for everyone, he objects to the schools' tracking of students, which has resulted in the closing off of options and opportunity for many, and he sees narrow vocational training as insufficient for a true level of general literacy. I think most of us would agree that both

children and adults do need options and do need access to the wide worlds of history, literature, science, the arts, etc., and Hirsch does prompt us all to think about the types of material we are making available to our students. Adult education, with its current emphasis on functional skills and job training, does run the risk of short-changing our students through a narrow curriculum focused solely on daily living and practical skills. Many teachers are looking for ways to "expose" students to a broader range of literature and non-fiction material. But, conversely, Hirsch's "national culture" curriculum, taken to its extreme, could prove equally narrow in its academic focus, its lack of material that's of immediate use (or possibly interest) to students, and its limited view of what's worth learning.

It seems to me that the issue is *not* whether literacy capabilities should be increased in this country or whether it would be good if people knew more about history, science, literature, etc. Few would argue with either proposition. The true issues, however, are: How do these goals interact with other legitimate goals of education (including, for example, I *would* say, the developing of reading, writing, and thinking skills and the development of a truly multicultural educational approach)? And what are the most acceptable and most successful approaches to reaching them? Unfortunately, in making the case for his position, Hirsch devotes little attention to these questions. Although the issue of specific content in education is an important one and must be considered, as a rallying cry and organizing principle for a revision of American education. Hirsch's "Dragnet" philosophy of curriculum ("just the facts, please") seems both limited and limiting. And, given the current regressive political climate, "dangerous" may also not be too strong a word.

Steve Reuys is Staff Development Coordinator at the A.L.R.I. (1987)

Teaching & Learning: New Approaches

Why I Stop In at Drop-In

By Christine James

First published May 1987

During Advent in Guatemala, there are several days of dancing and singing, processions and parties celebrating the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph and the birth of Jesus Christ, culminating in the quiet worship of Christmas Day. In Nicaragua, families gather together to share good food and to exchange gifts at midnight Christmas Eve. Families in El Salvador celebrate the holiday in much the same way as the nearby Nicaraguans.

Until recently, I had no notion of how Christmas was commemorated in Central America—I found out at the Tuesday night Community Drop-In at the Jackson/Mann School in Allston. I have learned about the Japanese and Colombian educational systems, the Korean and Brazilian economies, Costa Rican athletics, Haitian politics, and the customs, cultural values and world outlook of the peoples in all those countries and several other nations around the globe in these Tuesday night discussions.

Since the beginning of the first cycle of classes in the 1986-87 school year at Jackson/Mann, every Tuesday evening from 6:00 to 8:00 has been set aside for students from all of the adult education programs—ESL, ABE, GED, EDP, and others—to meet in the school's cafeteria for English conversation practice, extra help with class work, advice or information on job- or education-related questions, or just the chance to get to know other people in the Jackson/ Mann community. At about 6 o'clock on any given Tuesday, staff members, students and volunteer tutors will start to assemble at a few tables in one corner of the large eating hall. Greetings are exchanged, the weather duly noted, events of the weekend briefly recounted.

And then there are a few moments of awkward silence as we all try to think of something interesting to say. It's the kind of silence we've all endured when faced with the challenge of interacting with people we know only slightly or only in a different context. In this case, students with teachers who are not there to "teach," students with members of different classes who they've met just briefly on the stairwell between class sessions, and students and teachers alike with

people of vastly different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. All of these factors could intimidate the most outgoing of people, and sometimes those few moments seem endless.

But invariably, someone will have a question to ask about a new word or phrase they heard on the "T" or something to share about a newspaper article they read or a sporting event they saw on television. Someone else may arrive with photographs of a family trip or reunion that they just got developed and can't wait to share with a group of enthusiastic admirers.

What usually starts as a collection of four to six shy people scattered around a big table soon grows into a clutch of a dozen or so eager conversationalists crowding a suddenly-small table top. Soon the large group will break into small groups as people decide they want to discuss certain topics while others go off on different tangents. Still others may choose to play "Scrabble" or some other word game to help them build their vocabularies and to indulge in a little friendly competition. Often a tutor or staff member will spend the rest of the evening working one-on-one with a student who needs individual help that he or she can't always receive in class. Most nights, it seems, maps are taken out as people talk about where they're from and want to show each other their countries. Pencil and paper are always at the ready so people with varying pronunciation skills or vocabulary levels can communicate with each other through writing or drawing when they get stuck.

A lot of important communication of thoughts, feelings and ideas has happened at Drop-In over these months of Tuesdays. Students and staff have kept each other up on the various classes available at Jackson/Mann, and some students have been encouraged to attend new classes that will challenge them in new ways and help them on their way towards achieving their personal goals. This kind of intramural interaction keeps us all aware of the great human and material resources open to us at Jackson/Mann, and lets the students know that they themselves are among the most important of those resources. At least one student has gotten the encouragement and information necessary to help him challenge discrimination on the job. Some others have brought in questions about the skills and vocabulary required of careers they hope to enter as their English and their confidence grow.

Most often, and perhaps most rewarding, though, is that everybody who attends Drop-In has a chance to express themselves freely within a supportive network of fellow learners. By the time 8 o'clock rolls around—which is always sooner than seems possible—not a trace of that initial shyness remains and few of us have run out of things to say. And what's most amazing to this veteran of lecture halls and library stacks is that I've never cracked a book, never taken a note on these Tuesday evenings and, yet, I've been receiving a terrific education.

Christine James is an ESL and pre-GED tutor at the Jackson/Mann Community School in Allston. (1987)

English Into Action: Teaching ESL and ABE Through Drama

By Paula Ressler

First published November 1989

One day, as I was having a passionate discussion with a friend and colleague of mine, Alice Levine, a basic skills specialist, about one of my favorite subjects—how drama can be used as a teaching tool—she suggested I come to an ESL class she was teaching at Oficina Hispana to put my ideas into practice. I agreed. At the time, I was a graduate student in Theatre Education at Emerson College and I arranged to have the ESL classes I taught included in my coursework.

Alice and her students had identified some specific problems they were still having with spoken English. For the drama workshops, we decided to focus on these more affective skills, because they seemed most easy to address using drama techniques, and because we only had a limited amount of time in which to work. It was close to the end of the term.

Most of her students had developed many language skills, but some did not have enough confidence

in their English skills in situations such as job interviews and would often mumble to hide their discomfort. Some students had more difficulty in social situations and would appear as if they were making a speech instead of holding a conversation. Others would think so hard about their words that they would not put their feelings behind what they were saying, or make eye contact, and would not come across as believable.

The drama workshop began with a brief introduction about the difference between drama and theatre because some of the students were concerned about having to perform. The students were reassured that they were not going to perform for an audience, that no one was going to be judged, and that nobody would be pressured to do anything they didn't want to do.

Our first exercise began with a discussion—How do people introduce themselves in English and what could they say to a stranger they might want to meet? We began immediately to put English into action. We put on some music in the background and students were asked to suspend their disbelief and act as if they were at a party. Everyone was asked to stand up, walk around the room, make eye contact with someone, and introduce themselves to that person. This eventually developed into another scenario in which they ran into the same person in the supermarket a week later, but couldn't remember her or his name.

The next exercises we did brought in the element of body language and inflection. First students were asked to communicate to their partner that they wanted something very badly. They were asked to first communicate without words and to notice how they used their body. Then they used gibberish in order to explore inflection. Eventually, they added English and were asked to do the exercise until they communicated what they wanted to their partner and their partner believed them enough to grant their wish.

After a few more exercises to develop these skills, and once the students began feeling comfortable using appropriate body language and inflection, we divided the students into two groups to do improvisational dramas to practice the use of formal and informal speaking and using English to express strong convictions.

In the drama to explore formal and informal language, a family's daughter had just gotten engaged and her future husband's family was coming over for dinner. After the scene students who were watching were asked if they believed the characters in the scene, and why. Students also discussed vocabulary and ways in which the drama could be improved.

In order to give students a chance to play with the language and do some problem-solving on their feet, we added some obstacles to the scene. The roast that was being cooked for dinner burned because the oven was on the blink again, and the young woman's father had just lost his job. The family solved the problem by asking the fiance's family to chip in to get hamburgers from McDonald's. One student's five-year-old son was in class that day as well, because it was a public school holiday, and participated in the improvisation as the younger brother of the engaged daughter. He ate the imaginary dinner with extreme conviction, much to everyone's delight.

To explore speaking with conviction, we did an improvisation about a union organizing campaign at a hotel in which an illegal immigrant was afraid to join the union. Students did a wonderful job convincing this worker, using a variety of very complex arguments and tactics in English, that joining the union would be to his benefit.

In another drama, I participated in the role of someone who botches her job interview because she is very insecure, and Alice played the person who interviewed me. The students became the board of directors who agreed to talk to me and explain why Alice didn't give me the job. They gave me great advice. I tried again, but they wouldn't hire me either.

One of the most successful things we did was an exercise in which students got to use their bodies fully and had a chance to use English from a level of deep feelings. This exercise was adapted from one developed by Brian Way, from his book *Development Through Drama*. For this drama we arranged the room using tables and chairs and baskets, and anything else we could find in the room, to represent mountains, rivers, deserts, and swamps. Everyone in the class was a refugee on their way to a new country. To get there they had to cross these difficult terrains and hold on to each other to survive. Everyone's commitment to this drama was very strong. Students helped each other throughout and sweated and strained to reach their goal. Several students were pulled out along the way to play the role of photographers to capture facial expressions and body language. At the journey's end the students divided up into pairs to interview one another. This exercise could have easily developed into a writing exercise in which students wrote up each other's stories for a newspaper.

The students, during our feedback session, said that their favorite exercise was the refugee one, but they also really enjoyed the interview, the party, and the exercises they did trying to get what they wanted. They also suggested several other scenarios they wanted to try out in drama—how to deal with police, courts, and accidents, paying bills, more job interviews, and how not to get cut off when they are speaking. They also said they were interested in doing a regular play in which they had to memorize lines that they could perform for the rest of the school for graduation.

Although we did not have time to pursue all these ideas, we were able to spend one additional session developing short pieces through improvisation. One piece was about a situation in a hospital in which someone who didn't speak English was having difficulty getting the help she needed, ant the other took place in a store in which a recent immigrant was accused of stealing. During this session we also began to work on some performance techniques—basic acting and stage skills—and we drew up ground rules in order to keep our actions specific, consistent, and concrete.

Our experience using drama to teach ESL was a huge success. Some students who were usually reluctant to speak became animated participants in the dramas, taking risks with language and being very verbal. Many students made breakthroughs in eliminating their censors and didn't always have to stop to translate. From the beginning to the end, the creativity the students had a chance to explore, the earnestness with which they pursued their goals, the humor they added to each situation, and the trust and warm feelings that were generated made these workshops an absolute delight.

Although it was not possible in a few sessions to meet all our goals, Alice and I became very excited at the collaborative potential of efforts such as ours, and Alice felt enthused about incorporating some of the techniques we used into her regular classroom work. After this experience I also had many more ideas about exciting ways to incorporate drama into the teaching of ESL and ABE—including the development of reading and writing skills—and I am very eager to continue this sort of work at other programs.

Paula Ressler has her M.A. in Theatre in Education and is certified to teach Drama (grades 5-12) and English (grades 9-12). (1989)

Learning from Students: A Video Project in Workplace ESL

By Robin Reale

First published March 1990

The W.E. Fernald State School in Waltham, Mass., is the largest school for mental retardation in the Western hemisphere. Because approximately 60% of the direct care staff (staff that work directly with residents) speak English as a second language, the school decided to develop an ESL program in 1981. I've been the coordinator of the program for the past year. In addition to coordination, my work includes curriculum development for workplace specific ESL and teaching.

The idea to make an ESL video germinated during a John Cleese film festival. I liked the model that Mr. Cleese presented for staff development (using exaggeration and humor) but did not buy his videos because they were not job specific and I did not have $1,000. Instead, I decided to try to make our own video.

To get the project started, I met with several supervisors and direct care workers at the Fernald School. A common issue surfaced in all settings—the need to set up the work environment for success. This involves dressing appropriately for work (duties require lifting and bathing patients and other physical work), knowing the resident programs, and preparing work materials in advance.

For the ESL classes, I wrote scripts to teach not only work vocabulary but also job duties. The video depicted what I thought was almost every *inappropriate* workplace situation: sexual harassment, inappropriate workplace clothing, inappropriate tone of voice with clients, lack of knowledge about job duties and client programs.

To gather input, I involved staff from several different departments to work on the video.

This also promoted recognition of our program. Staff who were not aware of the ESL classes before now had first hand knowledge of it. I found a previously untapped plethora of skills in the staff—from

cameraman/director to librarian. The video was filmed in an actual residence on Fernald grounds. I had to rewrite the script after the filming because everyone became so involved in their parts that they ad-libbed. Then, I showed the video to the employees in the ESL classes. I tried different methods with different classes:

• I showed one class parts of the video without sound, asking them to write what they thought was being said. I asked them what would happen next. I asked comprehension questions. I had them read comprehension questions in small groups. We worked on cloze passages and verb tenses from the script.

• I handed out the script and had them practice the lines from the video.

• The students had to fill out an actual accident report because there was an accident in the video.

• The classes discussed the video. They looked at the problems and the reasons for the problems. They began to ask each other why those situations existed.

• I had two classes rewrite the script with an attempt to offer solutions through a dialogue. Each person was given a part. We wrote the dialogue collectively, line by line. Several debates started. I corrected the student scripts by typing them without errors. I did not make any final corrections on their original papers.

• The classes practiced the scripts, actually acting out each part.

Observations

• Although the original video blamed the unsuccessful staff/client interaction on the inappropriate dress of the direct care staff, the employees brought out an issue which was much more important to them. One class rewrote the script to take the onus off the direct care staff. The problem, as the ESL students saw it, was the client:staff ratio. The original video had shown a staff shortage. The supervisor had "floated" a staff person from one resident department to cover someone's absence in another work area. The employee in the video was left to shower several residents herself. The students rewrote the scripts asking for more staff coverage for their work.

• The new script brought up other sensitive issues—issues of forced overtime and staff shortages. The employees (students) selected the most important issues to talk about.

• The students also added positions I had not included: the psychologist and the physical therapist.

• The issues that I thought were important weren't necessarily the ones the students wanted to discuss. For example, I thought sexual harassment would be an important issue, but it was barely discussed. Other issues were more important to the students. (However, I brought this issue up in a later class with different students and got a very strong response—because it was a real problem for one women in class.)

• I observed areas where employees needed more training, such as client escort and mealtime procedures.

• We also began to explore social and cultural issues. Although women are asked to wear slacks to work because of the lifting, physical restraints, and bathing, many staff continue to wear dresses. Several of the women told me that they were not allowed to wear slacks in their country and that they did not want to start. They also thought that sneakers were a sign of poverty, not safety. The idea that people dress up for work was the dominant view. The subject of clothing and culture was discussed in another class. Comfortable, safe, and stylish shoes were discussed.

• Students who had previously been shy in class found a voice through the video project. They said "I need" when they invented new solutions to existing problems. They wrote the script using the collective vocabulary of the class to arrive at solutions. The students had never challenged so many ideas before. I felt as though I were watching them rewrite a real life script.

• While students began as the audience and became the actors, I had been transformed from actor to audience in a play which went beyond the classroom.

Robin Reale is the ESL Coordinator at the W.E. Fernald State School. (1990)

Breaking the Waiting List Logjam: Training Peer Tutors for ESL

By Roger Hooper

First published May 1992

In Boston's Chinatown, over 500 Chinese immigrants study basic survival English as a Second Language every year at the Quincy School Community Council (QSCC). In addition to these 500 people in classrooms, over 1000 immigrants are "on hold," waiting from two to four years for a seat in one of the QSCC bilingual Adult ESL classes. Approximately 300 new names are added to this waiting list annually, through open registration that never has to be advertised, such is the reputation of the AESL program in the Chinese immigrant community. Only about 150 slots open for new students each year. Now, an innovative program will break the waiting list logjam for many of these 1000 immigrants.

The Adult ESL program is one of five community service programs of the QSCC, a community-based non-profit organization in Chinatown. Along with adult English instruction, QSCC provides day care, after school child care, a summer camp, and community recreation. These programs are housed in a specially built complex that also houses a public elementary school and a neighborhood health clinic.

Adult ESL offers six levels and three years of instruction with bilingual teachers and counselors, using bilingual textbooks written by staff specifically for these students. These factors have established the reputation of the program. Immigrants come to register for admission to classes as soon as they arrive in Boston; one family even came from the airport in a taxi to register before they went to their new apartment to unpack and settle in! Two factors explain the waiting list logjam at QSCC/AESL: the popularity of the program itself, and constraints of funding and space.

In the summer of 1990, the Adult ESL staff, with help from the volunteer Community Council that governs and manages the organization, came together to strategize ways to break this logjam. The ideal solution—enough classes to absorb all the people on the waiting list—was unattainable. The recent struggle to maintain public and private funding at its current level to support 13 classes each semester meant that over 52 classes (a four-fold expansion of the program) was—for the time being—a pipe dream.

As staff and Council discussed alternatives, one suggestion began to stimulate everyone: to provide video-based ESL instruction at a low level for home study, to give some basic English skills to those individuals who wait for a classroom slot to open. This concept was appealing because it could help people while they were "on hold," waiting for regular classroom services. Also, it seemed attainable: discussion moved from brainstorming to realistic planning around this concept. Here is what was proposed:

Home Study Bilingual ESL Curriculum with Videocassettes

The idea of creating an original set of video ESL lessons was discussed but quickly scrapped when the cost and time needed was realized. Some staff had seen the Practical English video course produced in San Francisco's Chinatown in the early 1970's. These bilingual (Cantonese/English), competency-based ESL video lessons seemed an ideal option for this program concept, matching the bilingual, competency-based classroom curriculum of the QSCC/AESL program. Contact with the owner of these videos, a non-profit community organization in San Francisco called Chinese for Affirmative Action, brought eventual agreement between CAA and QSCC as to terms for our use of their video course in this new project.

In considering the use of videocassettes, a primary question was, how many individuals who might participate in this program would have a VCR at home? A survey was made of sample segments of our current learner population (from names on the waiting list as well as on our currently enrolled roster of learners). Of this sample, 93% reported owning and frequently using a VCR at home. The medium of videocassettes became not only appealing but practical.

The goal for learners was clarified: we would not supplant or replace classroom ESL, but would provide some help for those "on hold" pending enrollment into a class. This would be achieved through home study with bilingual ESL lessons on videocassette and periodic contact with tutors to support and monitor learners' progress.

Bilingual Tutoring Support for Learners

Several of the staff had had disappointing experiences with self-study or distance learning models where there was no direct, personal instructional support.

Especially for students with low educational backgrounds, such models, they saw, resulted in high drop-out rates, lack of progress, and inappropriate use of learning materials. The AESL staff was determined to build a home-study program that would avoid this fatal flaw. The project design was to include direct support for learners, through tutors who would give guided work (videos and worksheets) to take home, and who would meet periodically with the learners in small groups to review, solve problems, and assess progress.

But where, we wondered, would we find appropriate tutors? Teaching and counseling staff were clearly unable to add the additional responsibility of tutoring large numbers of home study students to their workload. As we discussed the waiting list problem, we also discovered another problem, that eventually provided a synergistic solution.

We had begun to receive more requests from students "graduating out" of our AESL program. These students recognized that they were far more proficient in English now, but they also wanted further study opportunities. Because our program fit their needs and lifestyles, most preferred to remain with us where the staff was bilingual, the curriculum was relevant to their lives, and the support systems (especially counseling and day care) were focused on the cultural needs and backgrounds of Asian (principally Chinese) immigrants. We knew we were unable to stretch our program resources to provide higher level classes, and even if that were possible, we agreed that any "stretch" of our program would have to be towards serving the low-end, entry level beginning ESL clients on our waiting list before we initiated additional services to higher level or graduating students.

Isaac Newton's problem was solved when the apple dropped from the tree. Our solution jumped out at us from these mounting requests from students at our highest level of ESL. We would use the learners who finished our highest level class and who wanted to stay in the program to use and expand their new English proficiency. We would train them and put them to work as tutors for peers who had no English and a two-year wait for beginning ESL class. The tutor and the learner would share a common first language and a common immigrant experience, factors that enhanced the concept. We now had the curriculum and the tutors; we proceeded to the overall design and the eternal problem: money.

Program Design and Fundraising

In the spring of 1991 we submitted a program design to two foundations. The design was organized around three activities: training of bilingual tutors, learner recruitment and orientation, and ongoing support to active tutor/learner matches.

Training of bilingual tutors: Recent graduates of the classroom AESL program would be recruited, interviewed and evaluated for potential success as tutors. Criteria for selecting tutors included English language skills, understanding of the support and mentoring role of the tutor, and commitment to community service. Tutor training would be done in ongoing 8-week cycles, six hours weekly in evening and weekend sessions (to accommodate work schedules) for a total of 48 hours of training. Content of the training curriculum would be: an intensive review of English structures and pronunciation problems; the role of the tutor as teacher and mentor, with case studies and role plays; and strategies for effective teaching of basic language skills. In addition, tutors would be given ample opportunity to preview the video materials and access to all video and print materials that might interest them or permit them to prepare for tutorial meetings with learners.

We decided that we would treat the tutors as paraprofessionals and would pay them an hourly rate for training. After training, they would receive compensation directly from the learners (at a recommended, modest and affordable hourly rate) during their service as tutors within our program. We felt (and feel) that the potential among tutors for self-empowerment, for new occupational skills training, and for genuine community resource development was not a "given" that would be assumed, but that instead was a factor that needed all the support and cultivation we could assemble, including financial support and reward.

Learner recruitment and orientation: With 1000 names on our waiting list, of which over 700 are beginning ESL level, no recruitment problems were anticipated. Clients on the waiting list liked this flexible and supportive alternative to a two- to four-year wait for classroom instruction. Access to video playback equipment was no issue. The acceptance of peer tutors, once the training and support of the AESL program was recognized, was (and is) universal. Access to these learners from the waiting list was an easy matter since all client data (waiting list, roster of active students, and list of graduates) is on a computerized database from which mailing and phone lists can be generated easily.

Tutor/learner matching, on-going support and bilingual learning materials: We developed a procedure to match tutors with learners and to supervise and support their on-going work. We established basic parameters of the tutorial sessions: format (one tutor with two learners in each meeting); frequency (every two weeks); length (two hours); duration (minimum six months); and goal (to raise the proficiency of learners by a minimum of one "level" as defined within the program's classroom ESL curriculum of six lev-

els). We established a procedure for circulating and monitoring the videocassette lessons. We wrote a formal training curriculum and "tested" it on an initial group of tutor trainees. We did all this through a full-time project coordinator and a part-time assistant who administer, monitor and deliver the recruitment and training of tutors, the recruitment and orientation of learners, the development and management of video and print curriculum materials, and the on-going monitoring and support of tutors and learners.

The project itself needed a name to solidify its identity and, hopefully, to clarity its mission. One of the several professionals in the Boston adult literacy network who was consulted in formulating the project design gave us the project name: TAG (Take and Give). Her initial reaction to the concept as we first presented it to her was that it reflected a very important exchange of skills that would empower and enrich this community of immigrants, a true "give and take." The acronym TAG was born. Later, the bilingual teaching staff, the prospective tutors being recruited and interviewed, and learners who inquired about the project verified that the community sees and values this quality of the project at least equally with the instructional aims.

In seeking funding, the project was presented to foundations with a focus on innovative educational projects targeted towards underserved populations. It was sold as a demonstration or model program that would require three years to bring from concept to full operation and would include full periodic evaluations. After three years, the project would be in full operation with a record of achievement and would be fundable through traditional funding sources. The total cost projected for the three year period was approximately $220,000, of which $50,000 would be matching funds or in-kind match. The money problem was solved with grants from two major private foundations. We immediately hired the project coordinator and moved on from there with planning, groundwork and outreach.

We are currently beginning the third training cycle for this project and are pleased that our initial brainstorming sessions have become a fully operational and successful part of our AESL program. We are confident that the project will continue and that the benefits will accrue to learners, tutors and the community as a whole. We will continue to train 36 tutors annually and place them into service with a total of 144 learners from our waiting list each year (not including learner attrition and replacement, projected at 15%, which raises the 144 learners to a total of 166 annually).

For our community of learners in Chinatown and the larger community of immigrants in Boston, the TAG program's eradication of barriers to empowerment, to personal and community resource development, and to self-direction and personal fulfillment is as significant as the more obvious eradication of barriers to communication in English. The successful integration of strategies to remove those barriers at all levels is our proudest achievement in the TAG project. TAG is working, and we plan to sustain, monitor and nourish this innovative solution to the waiting list logjam.

Roger Hooper is Director of the Adult English as a Second Language Program at the Quincy School Community Council. (1992)

Student Involvement

STUDENTS AND TEACHERS: CREATING AN ALLIANCE

By Mattie Wheeler, Ada Cherry, Vicky Nuñez, and Greg Leeds

First published May 1989

On March 11,1989, all of us went to a conference in New York City. The conference was called "Students and Teachers as Partners in Learning" and was held at Lehman College. The conference workshops were presented entirely by students or by students and teachers in collaboration.

The main purpose of the trip was to get ideas from other literacy students in New York City and to see how they help each other, to see how their programs are run, and to give them ideas on how our programs are run in Massachusetts. Below is what each of us found to be educational and interesting in New York City.

In the Big Apple

It was like a dream come true. I learned that the people chose to get together and help each other. In New York I learned that student and teacher need to help each other. The teacher don't have to run around the room to help you. We can do anything. We can't sit back looking for someone to do it for us. I didn't like the video tape "Bluffing It." It make us look stupid cause we can't read or write. We can do anything we want to. Don't let anyone tell you you can't do it.

—Mattie Wheeler

Vicky's Thoughts

After a morning of exciting workshops, the afternoon was dedicated to one session just for teachers and another session just for students. The teachers had the opportunity to write about what we hoped to remember from the conference. The following is what I wrote, which came out at a very gut level.

1) Adult literacy students are intelligent people.

2) Adult learners have different learning styles which need to be recognized and respected. Teachers need to learn to be quiet so that our students have the opportunity to find their voices, and once found, we need to work hard to listen and not dismiss what they

say just because it may go against what we think is best.

3) Adult student participation in an Adult Learning program is fundamental to education for social change. Student participation in their own program means that students are not being given something, but come into a learning environment in a partnership and thus in a more empowered position. This is not a recipe for instant equality; equality is a goal that must be struggled toward. Once we begin to incorporate student participation into our programs, we must take steps to insure that their participation isn't token. We should help create forums, like the conference, in which students can continue to grow and develop as partners in their learning programs.

Teachers should share their teaching philosophy with their students, and students should be aware that teachers don't know everything. We make mistakes, and very often we are learning just as much as the student. Teachers are students too.

I learned that I am RIGHT in all the caring that I do about my students, and the love that I share with them. In adult education programs we have the opportunity to be caring and sensitive human beings, and if we take advantage of that opportunity, not just during work hours, and not just in our personal and family relationships, but without boundaries, we are contributing to a more human society. Through my teaching I express my humanity, myself; I create myself with my students, and by all means we are certainly both benefitting from our partnership.

—Vicky Nuñez

Students & Teachers as Partners in Learning

On March 11, 1989, I went on a trip to New York City. The main purpose of the trip was to attend a Students and Teachers as Partners in Learning Conference. What I thought about the trip is that New York adult schools are so different than Boston. First of all the students that attend classes are willing to come to school to better themselves and to live better in society. They don't have enough teachers, so students are the tutors and the advocates in the classes. They have students teaching teachers, meaning the teachers learn how to teach adults better by learning how to listen to students' needs in class.

New York don't have site day care for the students. The students attend class only two days per week, two hours each day. There are handicapped students with non-handicapped. Unlike Boston welfare doesn't pay car fare for adult students. New York has a limit on how long a person stay in the program. Some schools hold classes with children and parents at the same time. And also I found out that students, parents learn with children in New York. They call each other if a classmate is out that day, it is called a "buddy" calling you.

I found the trip to be very educational. After learning so many different point of views I am most interested in forming a student support group at WEAVE where I attend classes. After returning from New York, I went to class and told the class about my trip. I feel as though I really got a good response and I was really inspired, everyone raised up their hands who wished to join. The feeling of sharing our thoughts will be so wonderful.

—Ada Cherry

Greg's Thoughts

This was the first conference I had ever attended where all workshops were presented by students. Workshop topics varied. For example, there were presentations on "Building an Active Student Organization," "Alternative Assessment," and "Free Writing." One exemplary workshop, presented entirely by students, was "Viewpoints."

Ms. Inez Seda, Mr. Nizam Ali, and Mr. Ronald Moore, all students of Literacy Volunteers of New York City, explained the purpose of the session: "We would like to educate the public about adult learners and how they are viewed in the media. We will show a video of a TV program about literacy. Then we will have an opportunity to discuss our reactions." Mr. Ali then turned on the video and showed a sample from a

A student support group would be beneficial to adult students in Boston. We find that a student support group could serve these purposes and could be run by the following principles:

1) Students only (maybe teachers sometimes)

2) Help each other in crisis and need of friends

3) Students relate to students better than to teachers

4) Students could bring your homework when you miss class, or carfare, food and clothing for students having a hard time

5) Students could call students who are out of school rather than the teacher calling

6) Tell how important school is to them and their family

7) To teach them to be more independent for themselves and their family

8) It will help the student open up more

9) Rapping in class could be fun

10) It will help to release stress

11) It will help you to learn more about your family and friends, students, etc.

—Mattie Wheeler and Ada Cherry

recent ABC special on literacy, "Bluffing It."

After a 5-minute viewing, the audience (made up of students and teachers) was asked how they thought the students were portrayed in the video. The presenters gave their opinions—they felt that this program, like many, portrayed students as helpless. The presenters facilitated the discussion and finally led it toward strategizing how they could educate the media, the public, and the literacy programs to stop these negative portrayals of students.

I have come to know one of the presenters, Ms. Seda, over the past 4 years. She has developed public speaking skills as she participated on student councils (that her literacy program encouraged her to attend) and as she helped other students in her class (tutoring them, participating on the welcoming committee for new students, creating support groups, etc.). This was not her first presentation. Her program makes a conscious effort to include students in staff and tutor development.

Her workshop captures for me the essence of what the conference was reaching for: trusting students and in so doing developing an alliance with them that will lead to the best quality and most respectful education. Students were teaching teachers, they were correcting negative images portrayed by a media that was "helping" them (helping not in partnership), and they were strategizing how to change the bad images.

Students who presented at the conference thought their participation was important for several reasons: for the experience of public speaking and designing workshops, and for developing employment skills, life skills, and political organizing skills. Some saw it as political—as a way to gain power. Some saw it as a way to help other students; some saw it as a way to get ahead.

Teachers who came to the conference saw it in many ways, too. Some saw the student presentations as a concrete step towards (the often tossed around phrase) "empowering" or "participatory" education. Some felt it wasn't for all students—that not all students had the time or interest in participating in something like this. But even those who didn't participate benefitted: from seeing models of students who participated, from the reshaping of teachers attitudes—moving away from attitudes of students being helpless—and from the restructuring of programs that could come out of the partnership.

Some teachers felt this merger of students and teachers was paternalistic—a few pet students benefitted but no structural programmatic changes were going to come out of it. Along this note, they pointed to the fact that at many of the workshops, while students presented, the students looked toward the teacher for direction, approval, and even permission to speak. Some felt the student councils and workshops that had developed acted as little more than rubber stamps: they were just tools to help promote what the directors already wanted to do, but with a student voice to make it happen. These teachers saw the conference and the student councils the same as many high school governments. They give an authentic indigenous sound but the agenda is still that of the school's principal and teachers. Many people felt that literacy practitioners are not ready to give up and share power.

I agree with these comments but I saw the conference as a new opening of political space. Students were being invited to participate in their program's development. They were being invited to help train the teachers and to form councils. How much their advice will be trusted and respected is still unknown.

In the past I have seen students frustrated when structural changes they suggested were ignored. This frustration leads some students to quit and others to look for other paths to make changes. The programs that were in this conference opened up a space for students to participate. If the programs close off that space when they feel threatened, the students will open up new spaces for themselves.

So little political space exists for the students we are trying to serve that I applaud any attempt to rectify this situation. I see down the road a literacy system that is a web of teachers and students, funders and advocates, all collaborating and sharing power. Small steps like this conference are steps down that road.

—Greg Leeds

Mattie Wheeler is a student at the Jamaica Plain Community School. Ada Cherry is a student at WEAVE. Vicky Nuñez is a teacher at Jamaica Plain Community School. Greg Leeds is an A.B.E. Specialist at the A.L.R.I. (1989)

PARTICIPATORY EDUCATION IN PRACTICE

By Lenore Balliro

First published May 1991

One of the more interesting events I attended at the recent TESOL conference in New York City was not at the conference at all; it was a student council meeting of ESL students in the Worker-Family Education Project of the ILGWU (International Ladies Garment Workers Union) and was held at the ILGWU Union hall on the Lower East Side.

As part of a panel entitled "Participatory Practices in Workplace ESL: The Route to Empowerment?" I had the chance to meet with coordinators, teachers, and students from the ILGWU and ACTWU (Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union) workplace education programs. I was happy to accept an invitation to attend a student council meeting of the ILGWU's Project. This meeting gave me a chance to see in practice some of the elements of participatory education that the panelists talked about.

Present at the meeting were student council officers and student delegates from the various ESL classes in sites throughout NYC. Their discussion and decision making focused on planning a cultural week to highlight cultural diversity within the project. This was a student-run meeting; although coordinator Deidre Freeman was present, she did not chair. Rather, she acted as a liaison between the students and the program by answering policy questions (availability of rooms, etc.) and agreeing to get additional information as students planned specifics of the event. She was readily available to give feedback and technical assistance when it was asked of her, but did not supply overt direction in the process. In addition, Deidre provided information to the council about upcoming events and updates so they could go back and inform their own "constituents" at the various ESL sites. For example, she invited students to attend a New York State ESL/ABE conference and noted that for students who wanted to attend, the union would supply their registration fee. The meeting was conducted in Spanish with unsolicited translations considerately provided, when necessary, for the visitor from Boston. Deidre moved fluidly between Spanish and English.

Some of the delegates at the meeting voiced their concern that there was not a broad enough base of students to carry out the cultural event. After the meeting, they accompanied Deidre to an ESL class to update the class about the event and to explore why there wasn't more participation. Two interesting things happened here—both excellent examples of participation in practice.

First, Deidre questioned students about falling attendance in ESL classes since a new policy change was made: the introduction of theme-based classes to help build the cultural event. Students spoke with candor; it seemed clear that their opinions had been solicited before and that there was a basis of trust, even with a stranger present (me.) Deidre took the information from the students and recognized the need to make changes based on that feedback. Next, the student delegates did some targeted organizing and outreach to students to increase participation in the event. ("We need you to help paint the mural—can we count on your artistic skills?/Don't you want Mexico represented at the cultural week?/Will we see you next Tuesday?") This sort of student-to-student exchange seemed qualitatively different from a discussion where teachers were encouraging students to participate in an event they (the teachers) had conceived and planned. None of these negotiations detracted from the goal of the ESL class—it all took place in English.

The student council, an elected body of student representatives from the various ESL program sites, is one illustration of the ILGWU's participatory approach to adult education. According to Maureen LaMar, co-coordinator of the program, the ILGWU's educational belief is consistent with the union's "tradition of organizing and collective action; we have always sought ways to involve students in all aspects of the program—from the classroom to shaping the curriculum to the decision making process."

In addition to the student council, student involvement can be seen in the following ways:

- student controlled bulletin board areas where students post readings, notices, cards, and other materials to share among themselves and with other program participants;
- workshops, conferences, round table discussions about topics chosen by students;
- student run magazines.

Ensuring that these participatory practices are implemented consistently isn't easy. As Jesus Mendes recounted on the panel, "When the teachers first asked us what we wanted to learn, I didn't know what to say. NO ONE had ever asked my opinion before! We

said—we want to learn English!" Jesus described how students became more sophisticated in their feedback, especially after practicing various techniques introduced by teachers to help them analyze what they wanted to learn and how they learn best. In one case, this increased feedback and student interaction led to students selecting their own ESL teacher.

Student Councils have been pivotal in increasing both student and teacher involvement, according to Maureen. As she noted on the TESOL panel: It is clear that as students have become more vocal, more skilled in organizing, more clear about their responsibilities to reflect on what they need and their right to ask for it—the program in general has changed.

Two student-generated documents illustrate the principles of the student council. A brochure for students gives an overview of the council—its function, the responsibilities of the delegates and the responsibilities of the officers. A more revealing publication is the "Student Council Program Guide" developed by two of the program sites. This guide is the result of a committee of students who met every two weeks in the summer of 1990 to discuss the role and election process of the student council as well as issues in curriculum and teaching. As the introduction notes: "The group felt that many students would be more comfortable with at least a general overview of what's covered on each level (of ESL)...." As a result, the guide does provide an overview of what can be expected in the various ESL levels as well as teaching methodologies. The statement of purpose begins: "In this program we believe that students and teachers work together to create classes which meet the needs and interests of the students. This process is a dialogue which continues during the year."

Much of the success of the ILGWU's program has resulted from determined and committed leadership from the coordinators—women who are willing to put in extended hours at a variety of locations, who have learned to solicit feedback from students and use it to make program changes, who recognize the value of continually "checking in" to see how the program is going, and who continually document their work in the form of guidebooks and other publications. Perhaps most important, they are leaders who have been willing to step back, to let their own authority "wither" as the voices and involvement of students becomes stronger.

We have invited the student council to contribute an article to *All Write News* and hope to hear more about their experiences in a later issue. In the meantime, if you'd like copies of the student council program guide, you can write to the ILGWU Worker-Family Education Project, 1710 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

(By the way, it was heartening to note that the theme of participatory education was highlighted at TESOL this year more than in previous years. A three-part series of symposia, colloquia and workshops on Participatory Education, organized by Elsa Auerbach of UMass and featuring practitioners from Boston as well as other urban locations nationally, provided a thread of continuity for participants interested in exploring the theme.)

Lenore Balliro is the ESL Coordinator at the A.L.R.I. (1991)

Programs Promote Student Involvement

By Eileen Barry, Tina Kluetmeier, Martha Merson, and Anna Taylor

First published November 1992

This article features three adult literacy programs in Massachusetts that currently involve students in ways that go beyond the usual class attendance. The programs themselves differ with regard to the students they serve and the instructional options they provide: The ABCD Learning Center offers basic reading, writing and math as well as GED and pre-GED classes and electives for 20 hours a week. Literacy Volunteers of Quincy, located in the Thomas Crane Library, uses one-to-one and small group tutoring as the basis for instruction. The Workplace Education Project, based at the Labor Education Center at UMass Dartmouth, offers classes to workers at five different sites, four hours per week for ESL and six hours per week for GED. Their approaches to student involvement differ as well. ABCD has a student council complete with

officers. LVA Quincy involves students in ongoing projects and extra groups. The Workplace Education Project has a Student Advisory Board.

But these three programs are also similar in two ways. First, each has extensive support for their student involvement projects from program staff members. Second, staff agree that these projects are in their infancy. Thus far, the experiments seem to be working and the groups have plans for the future.

Below, staff from each of these programs describe the activities and formats they have found successful so far.

—Martha Merson

ABCD: New Organizers Combine Ideas and Money

When ABE students at ABCD's (Action for Boston Community Development) Learning Center enter the program, they choose two classes as electives. A popular choice is the Student Council, created last February. From the Student Council class, officers are nominated and schoolwide elections are held. The Council, with leadership from the officers, organizes Center events, raises money, and provides valuable support for the Center's policies and programs.

For example, the Dinner at Lunchtime project was a super fundraiser. Members of the Council cooked and sold barbecued chicken, collard greens, cornbread and soda. The group raised $115, which they spent on awards and acknowledgments for supportive staff members at the Learning Center's annual Graduation Ceremony. The Student Council also took the lead role in organizing the graduation. They invited Rodney Daley, director of Gang Peace, to be the guest speaker. In addition to Daley, Student Council officers Erik English and Lorna Pleas spoke to the crowd. Also, Student Council members appealed to local vendors for Graduation Ceremony donations, and New Elegant Catering and the Boston Flower Exchange came through with food and flowers.

The Student Council has also played a key role in making the Learning Center a safe and pleasant learning environment. The group has reviewed such program policies as "no smoking," "no fighting," and "no headphones." By abiding by and supporting these rules, Student Council members have influenced others to comply with these policies.

—Anna Taylor

LVA-Quincy: All Kinds of Help

This past year we have seen students take a more active role in LVA-Quincy. This change began last fall when Francis Goss represented Massachusetts at the Third National Adult Literacy Congress in Washington D.C. Frances returned to inspire both tutors and students to participate in our literacy program at all levels.

In addition to meeting with their tutors once a week, both reading and ESL students are teaching. They have spoken to new volunteers in tutor training workshops, represented LVA-Quincy at regional and state conferences, and written articles for the newsletter. Students have actively participated in our book discussion and conversation groups. They have helped process our literacy collection, a time-consuming job that involves reinforcing bindings and cataloging books for circulation.

Student involvement makes our program better and stronger. We are encouraging students to continue this trend. We are inviting tutors and students to attend many of our inservice programs together, learning with and from each other. We will continue our book discussion group this year with a new focus and a new title: National Issues Forum. We will also continue our conversation group for ESL tutors and students.

—Tina Kluetmeier

Workplace Education Program: Meaningful Input

A primary goal of the Workplace Education Project is that learners take as much control of the program as possible. The Student Advisory Board of the Workplace Education Project is helping us reach that goal.

The Student Advisory Board was established in 1990. When the plans for the board were being discussed, the other teachers and I were unsure about the direction it would take. We were also unsure about the best structure for the group or for the meetings. We did know that we wanted to establish a forum for learners to meet and to discuss the project and to make recommndations for improvement and for new directions. It was established that the advisory board would meet once per month. Two members of each class would be elected as representatives and would meet with the project coordinator and other representatives to discuss class and program issues. We decided that when the board met, they could determine some of the more specific points such as if a chairperson and vice chairperson should be selected and how the group would function.

At the time that we were discussing the formation for the advisory board, several heated local and state campaigns were underway. With everybody's attention focused on the elections, it was an ideal time to introduce our own elections for the project. In class, we discussed the idea of the advisory board and the role of the reps. After considering the traits that the students were looking for in their reps, we conducted a nomination process in which several students were selected to run for the position. If a nominee did not consent, his

or her name was withdrawn. Elections were scheduled to coincide with the state and local elections. This seemed to add to the excitement of the project. During class, the nominees each had an opportunity to make a statement about themselves and why they were the best candidate. All members of the class then voted, using a secret ballot, and the results were announced at the end of class.

Of course, classes participated in this project with varying levels of enthusiasm. For example, members of a beginning level ESL class were reluctant to attend a meeting where others would have a much stronger command of the English language. With assurance that this was an excellent opportunity for them to practice and improve their English, and with the knowledge that someone could help them translate, two of the braver members of class accepted the positions. (So, in this class, the actual election was unnecessary.) Also, because this is a part-time project with many students who work full time on various schedules, it was difficult to find a time to meet that was convenient for everyone. This precluded some from participating. Another obstacle was the meeting place, since it was difficult at first to find a volunteer who was willing to drive from Fall River to New Bedford. (At first we went ahead without a representative from Fall River, but eventually someone decided to attend.)

To prepare for the meetings, teachers set aside time in class for the representatives to survey the class members for any suggestions, complaints, or ideas that they thought should be discussed at the meeting. It is important to note that teachers reserved time in class after each meeting so the reps could report back.

Initially, the representatives talked positively about what their classes had been working on. While this was gratifying to hear, I explained that their teachers would not be upset if they discussed more unpleasant issues that arose in class. I explained that all of the teachers welcomed the ideas of the students and would use their suggestions to improve the classes. With this encouragement, a discussion of some of the common issues in all of the classes began. We discussed a variety of issues such as what should be done if some students spoke only their native languages in class and what could be done about students who were chronically late for class. The group developed guidelines which they brought back to their classes for discussion.

So far, the group has felt that everyone should have an equal say in the group. No chair was elected. The group felt that I could work with them to develop the agenda and to take notes of the meeting. While I was concerned that my presence at the meetings would hinder free expression, they assured me this would not be a problem.

The meetings have provided an opportunity for students from different classes to meet and to become familiar with what was going on in other classes in the project. Other than the annual holiday celebration and Recognition Celebration in June, most learners had had little opportunity to interact with students from other locations. The advisory board could now serve as a link to connect the classes in the project.

We have continued to meet on a monthly basis. Each meeting continues to serve as a time when students can update each other on enjoyable lessons and to air frustrations that they may be experiencing. Member of the board have become more involved in planning our bi-annual celebrations but they have also helped to make some important programmatic decisions. Any ideas for recruitment, assessment, or instruction that are discussed at teachers' meetings are also presented to the board. In response to a proposal made by the board, the schedule and times for certain classes were changed. The set-up of the GED classes was also revised based upon the input of the group. Beginning this year, members of the board or other class members will be asked to participate in interviews when hiring new staff.

The impact of the board is apparent in the classes. The atmosphere has changed since students in the program realize that their input is valued. The notion that each participant can assume responsibility for the quality of the program seems to be spreading. Students often no longer wait for the representative to bring an issue to the board, but are more willing to bring up issues in class.

This year there will not be an election to choose reps. At our last meeting for the 91-92 schoolyear, the board decided that each member of each class should have an opportunity to attend a meeting. They explained that serving on the board is an important responsibility and an exciting opportunity which everyone should experience.

—Eileen Barry

Martha Merson is the ABE Specialist at the A.L.R.I. Anna Taylor is a counselor at ABCD. Tina Kluetmeier is the volunteer coordinator at Literacy Volunteers of Quincy. Eileen Barry is a teacher and coordinator for the Workplace Education Project at UMass/ Dartmouth's Labor Education Center. (1992)

Reading & Writing in ABE Contexts

THE ON-GOING DEBATE IN LITERACY & READING

By Steve Reuys

First published January 1991

In preparing for a possible A.L.R.I.-sponsored study circle on literacy and thinking about things the group might want to read, it seemed that good candidates for getting a lively discussion going would be some of the essays by Frank Smith, a former professor of education at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. These essays are collected in book form under the titles *Essay Into Literacy* (Heinemann, 1983) and *Joining the Literacy Club* (Heinemann, 1988). In this article I'd like to discuss briefly what I found to be interesting and provocative about these pieces. As always in this newsletter, I'd like to encourage readers to reply; it would be great if a dialog on literacy could take place via these pages.

Many (hopefully most) adult basic education teachers are aware that important changes have taken place over the past 20 years in how *writing* is seen by teachers, how it's presented to students, and how it is "taught." No longer is writing seen as a largely mechanistic activity focused primarily on correctness in grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc. Through the work of many, many people, including Peter Elbow, Lucy Calkins, Mina Shaunessey, Donald Graves, and Donald Murray to name but a few, writing is now seen much more as a means of personal exploration, expression, and communication. The emphasis has swung from mechanics to meaning, with grammar, spelling, etc. seen as "tools" (important tools, but tools nonetheless) in the building of meaning. Attention has focused on the process of writing, which encourages students through various stages when writing (pre-writing activities, first draft, revision(s), editing, final draft) rather than aiming for a largely-mythical initial perfection. And there seems to be general agreement on the notion that to get better at writing, one needs to write, to be given opportunities to write things that have some real purpose and individual relevance, rather than concentrating on editing skills and artificial exercises. It's widely accepted now that this view of writing

makes sense (though how much it's actually being implemented is a good question).

Reading, however, seems to be another matter. There is, I believe, a parallel controversy over what reading is, how we do it, and how to teach it, but there is much less general agreement among teachers on which road to follow than there now seems to be with regard to writing. Traditionally, if I may try to sum things up rather quickly, the belief has been that reading is essentially a matter of decoding symbols to sounds, that when we read we use phonics to convert letters and letter combinations into sounds, and that teaching reading means in large part teaching phonics through various drills and exercises. With so-called "remedial" reading, this emphasis on phonics has been even more pronounced (as it has been for teachers especially concerned with dyslexia, which may be a separate, though obviously related issue).

But a number of other educators propose a very different view of things. They argue that reading happens largely through the recognition of words, that it is driven primarily by meaning, prediction, and context, and that (quoting Frank Smith) "reading makes you good at phonics, rather than phonics making you good at reading." In his essay "Twelve Easy Ways to Make Learning to Read Difficult," first published in *Psycholinguistics and Reading* in 1973, Smith lists twelve commonly-accepted rules for reading teachers that he feels actually interfere with the process of learning to read. These guidelines which he asserts teachers should *not* follow are:

1. Aim for early mastery of the rules of reading.
2. Ensure that phonic skills are learned and used.
3. Teach letters or words one at a time, making sure each new letter or word is learned before moving on.
4. Make word-perfect reading the prime objective.
5. Discourage guessing; be sure children read carefully.
6. Insist upon accuracy.
7. Provide immediate feedback.
8. Detect and correct inappropriate eye movements.
9. Identify and give special attention to problem readers as soon as possible.
10. Make sure children understand the importance of reading and the seriousness of falling behind.
11. Take the opportunity during reading instruction to improve spelling and written expression, and also insist on the best possible spoken English.
12. If the method you are using is unsatisfactory, try another. Always be alert for new materials and techniques.

There isn't space here to explore his argument with each of these "sacred cows" of reading instruction, but I urge you to read his essays to explore them further. It is interesting, though, to compare Smith's list with a similar list of "The Seven Most Common Mistakes Made by Remedial Reading Teachers," by Jerry L. Milligan, a professor of reading education at Washington State University, first published in the *Journal of Reading* in November 1986. His seven deadly sins are:

1. Not enough time is spent reading.
2. Making phonic decoding skills the focus of diagnosis.
3. Too much time is spent teaching phonic decoding skills.
4. Encouraging the reader to sound through unfamiliar words.
5. Focusing on the accuracy of oral reading.
6. Not recognizing the importance of background knowledge.
7. Incorrect treatment of reversals.

(For those of you who may be wondering about now, if all this is true, then what's the use of the alphabet?, Smith's essay with that question as its title suggests that the advantages of our alphabetical system of writing lie not in the role it supposedly plays in learning to read, but rather in helping us to organize the world, in making reproduction of writing much easier, and in giving us a way to talk about and remember written language.)

Okay, so according to Smith and his cohorts, how *do* children and adults learn to read? In "Conflicting Approaches to Reading Research and Instruction," "Joining the Literacy Club," and other essays, Smith argues that one learns to read by reading and that the teacher's role is to help the students to read by, using Smith's metaphor, facilitating and promoting their admission to "the literacy club." This means providing meaningful and useful reading and writing activities in which students can participate without evaluation and in which collaboration with the teacher, fellow students, and others is always available. What would this look like? Well, although unalterably opposed to "programs" and "labels" (believing that "teachers make the difference, not prescriptions, materials, or activities"), Smith does agree that his ideas are very similar to the "whole language" philosophy of teaching. So a helpful illustration can be provided by looking at a true whole-

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language-oriented classroom, which might, for example, make use of language experience texts; group oral reading; sustained silent reading; reading, re-reading, and re-telling of published texts; instruction on reading strategy, etc. (This list is taken from Francis Kazemek's useful article "Whole Language in Adult Literacy Education," in *Information Update*, December 1989.)

Smith also places the issues of reading and literacy within a larger context of learning and education in the essays "The Choice Between Teachers and Programs" and "How Education Backed the Wrong Horse." He argues that, over the past hundred years, education has make a huge mistake by putting its faith in the world of experimental psychology and its derivatives—instructional programs (and the goal to make curricula "teacher-proof"), decontextualized learning, sub-skill lists and hierarchies, evaluation, and accountability. Rather than experimental psychology, "anthropology is the other horse that education could have backed," with its emphasis on ethnography and qualitative analysis. The anthropological view suggests that learning happens when reading (or anything else) is made interesting, when the learners are involved in activities they see as attainable and worthwhile, and when "apprenticeships" and "collaborations" are made possible, rather than through the "centralized standardized technologies of teaching and testing that threaten to swamp our classrooms." (These arguments are echoed, of course, in the current adult ed. debate over standardized testing (based in the world of quantitative experimental psychology) vs. alternative modes of assessment that emerge from a qualitative, anthropological view of learning and literacy.)

Of course, these are not purely academic arguments. As a teacher, how you see these issues will have a large effect on what you do with your students. What do you think? What is literacy? What is reading? How do we read? How do we learn to read? How do we as teachers teach reading? Adult literacy teachers should have opportunities to think, read, and talk about these issues and arguments concerning literacy and reading, learning and teaching, and the A.L.R.I. would like to encourage this process in any ways we can.

Steve Reuys is Staff Development Coordinator at the A.L.R.I. (1991)

Relevant Reading for Adult Students

By Nandi Attya

First published July 1991

While I was tutoring a small group of adults, I realized that much of the reading material was not relevant and diminished the enthusiasm which the adult student needs. I visited the Adult Literacy Resource Institute library to find culturally relevant adult reading materials and discovered *And Still We Rise* by Barbara Reynolds, of *USA Today*. The book consists of interviews with 50 Black role models, such as Walter Fauntroy, Maya Angelou, Tony Brown, Shirley Chisholm, Marva Collins, Robert Woodson, and Arthur Ashe. These are Black role models living today who have experienced the negative forces of oppression amidst many forms of institutional racism and who could be examples of having "risen above" a system designed to "bury us alive."

It is important for teachers to provide the adult student with materials what will encourage him/her personally as well as academically. As African-Americans, it is essential to know not just the names of our role models, but to read about how they overcame the many obstacles with determination and made a significant contribution to humanity.

In these interviews, the student has the opportunity to become the interviewer: to be the person asking the questions instead of the one answering the questions. In this reading material, students can identify with the personal struggle and this understanding penetrates into the mind and spirit of each adult student. The reading material of *And Still We Rise* provides language that is clear, personal, relevant, and direct. This is what I consider to be the needed ingredient in community-based adult literacy programs. Providing materials which enhance the individual persons, not

materials which exclude and devalue the contributions made by members of the adult learner's culture.

One of the questions from *And Still We Rise* in an interview with Maya Angelou reads as follows:

> USA TODAY: Are people innately talented?
>
> ANGELOU: I believe that every person is born with talent. We come from the Creator, as the poet Wordsworth says, "trailing clouds of glory." We are all creative, but by the time we are 3 or 4 years old someone has knocked the creativity out of us. Some people shut up the kids who start to tell stories. Kids dance in their cribs, but someone will insist they sit still. But the time creative people are 10 or 12 years old, they just want to be like everybody else.

This expresses a reality that most adult learners can relate to and helps us to understand those experiences which interferred with our growth personally and educationally. *And Still We Rise* is a book which I recommend highly to all people in adult education programs because it is informative for those who have not been exposed to the experiences and achievements of African-Americans.

Nandi Attya has been teaching recently in the adult education program at WAITT House in Roxbury. (1991)

Singing the Red Pen Blues: Ideas for Teaching Writing

By Gail Hart and Janet Stein

First published March 1989

The following two pieces were originally written while the authors were participating in the A.L.R.I. mini-course "The Red Pen Blues: Teaching Reading and Writing to Adults," presented by Greg Leeds this past October-November. They are reprinted from the collection of writings which the course produced.—Ed.

I woke up that Tuesday morning with no lesson plan. I decided to rely on "inspiration" to show me the way.

The night before I was listening to one of my favorite cassettes, which has a variety of musical styles on it, including Billie Holiday, Bob Marley, and Run-DMC. The only thing I was inspired to do was to listen to music, so I took my tape and box to school. It was time to do one of those "sensory" exercises. I started choosing my words on the #44 bus: "Just listen to the music and write down whatever comes to mind..."

Standing in front of the class, I continued the monologue. "Don't worry about spelling or grammar. Just listen to it first. I'll play it again." I selected "El Chuntunquero" by the Peruvian group Fortaleza. I presumed that few in the class would have heard Andean music before. To help, I wrote some guide questions on the board: 1) How does the music make you feel? 2) Which instruments do you hear? 3) Where is the music from? The piece begins with the sound of birds chirping. The primary instruments used are pan flutes and strings, and light but steady percussion. No singing.

The students were really into it. They listened closely at first, then began scribbling away, as I played it over. I was pleased to see doodles, sketches and other marginalia, which indicated to me that their minds were relaxed and free. Karon admitted having a writer's block, and saying it out loud helped her to overcome it. The other students helped by asking her questions and chatting about their own impressions. Really, this class was like a TV version of an ABE class: Creative! Involved! Conscientious!

After about the seventh playing, folks started to compare notes. Yes, they were talking about the assignment, not something else, as tends to happen about 20 minutes into a writing exercise. The music assisted them to focus on the work.

Finally, I asked people to share what they had written. It was like opening a box of assorted chocolates! Such diverse and creative pieces came out of that 30-40 minute exercise. Ada wrote a dream sequence called "China Dance," in which she imagined herself floating on a cloud, surrounded by lily-clad Chinese dancers. She read it with such soul. Elaine's was just as whimsical, although more earthly. She said the music made her feel like putting on her yellow dress and yellow shoes and eating popcorn. She even drew a box of popcorn and balloons in her margin. Tanya said the music sounded like a movie soundtrack. She envisioned a Mexican man riding through the desert on horseback, in search of an adventure. Janice wrote a haunting short story about a Japanese woman awaiting her husband's return from battle, and decorating their home with fresh flowers.

I was blown away. The students were so talented that it was almost intimidating. That exercise demonstrated how high their standards were. Accordingly, I had to raise my own standards.

As each person revealed their impressions, I recorded key words on the board, including their guesses as to which nation the music came from. Africa, China, and Mexico were the main ones. I told them the music was Peruvian and asked someone to find Peru on the map. That map always seems to work its way into our lessons.

The students were impressed with each other. I think they were really proud of each other and recognized individual talent.

The exercise illustrated a few things that I had been trying to explain in previous classes. One was the value of pre-writing, going with one's initial impression and worrying about mechanics later. The music made it easier. The other was the power of description. Lastly, the exercise reminded us all that there are always an infinite number of ways to look at the same thing (or listen to the same song).

The next class was used for editing, spelling checks and the like. In the meantime, Janice created a gorgeous multi-colored paper mosaic of a woman in a kimono. It was truly beautiful. I was pleased that the exercise released this other impulse in her.

Not every unplanned exercise turns out to be so successful. However, I believe that this one worked so well precisely because all of us, teacher and students, were spontaneous that day. If I had sat down on Monday night and said, "O.K., this exercise will demonstrate the value of pre-writing and people will be focused because of the music, etc.," I would not have been able to present it as clearly as I had, and the students would not have picked up the "creative spark" as well as they did. Not to be overblown, but it's almost like making love...almost. All right, it's not like making love. But like making love, "sensory" lessons seem to be better when unplanned. So from now on, I'll give myself and my students a break a couple of times a month and just grab something and take it to class. I think we trust each other enough to create something beautiful.

—Gail Hart

The students in my pre-GED classes are new to the idea of the critical essay. Most of them are new to formal writing, and some are new to writing in English. They can write passable paragraphs on intimate subjects, but they're a long way from mastering the organization, structure and conventions of formal compositions. So we've got a lot to cover.

I spend about half of each class on the skills needed to organize ideas and write correct sentences to convey them. I try to introduce these a few at a time, using student writings as source material. If I see a number of students struggling with verb tense, for example, I write exercises that focus on changing present to past or vice versa.

We also work each week on the process of writing. I include worksheets with each assignment to help students list ideas before they try to write sentences or paragraphs. Later, when they have "finished" their writing, I give them concrete suggestions for proofreading: Do they have capitals where they belong? Have they used periods and commas correctly? Are the verbs correct? I try to help students apply the lessons on structure and mechanics to their own work, and I encourage them to mark corrections right on their papers.

Even so, the progress is slow. An hour—or two—devoted to recognizing and repairing run-ons is that much less time for subject-verb agreement. And what about parallel form? What about the structures that haven't appeared in student writing as source material? And what about style?

These questions, along with the anxiety I share with my students about their passing the GED, made me look for ways to accelerate the pace of my lessons. I wanted a way to let students see all the stages in the writing process. I also wanted to convince them that a sloppy draft is not the sign of a "poor" writer. These goals led me to plan a session called "Essay in Progress." The class would assign me a GED-type question, and I would write the essay and "talk through" what I was doing.

I resolved the technical difficulty of how to demonstrate the writing process to 18 people by using an overhead projector. I handed out a list of sample questions, and the class voted on the one for me to do. I used the rest of the session (about 90 minutes) to plan,

write and revise the essay on the screen.

I began by analyzing the question out loud. (Just how long is 200 words?) Once we were clear about the assignment, I asked the group to call out ideas to get us started. Then we organized the list into three categories and gave each a title. An introductory paragraph followed. Then three paragraphs for the body, and one for the conclusion.

Along the way, I changed my mind, backtracked, crossed out and inserted. The students who copied the writing as it progressed had no choice but to make the same changes on their papers that I did on mine. It is still too soon for me to know how much this exercise will help students with their writing. At the very least, looking at my arrows, X's and squiggles may have shaken my students' belief that writing can appear on the page in polished, final form.

—Janet Stein

At the time these pieces were written, Gail Hart was teaching at the Aswalos House/WEAVE Program in Roxbury, while Janet Stein was working in Roxbury Community College's Division of Extended Education. (1989)

Reading & Writing in ESL or Bilingual Contexts

Of Ducks, Experience, and Reading: A Bilingual ESL Project

By Frank Smith

First published November 1991

How gratifying it is when the application of an "approach" or "technique" in the real-life classroom is well-received by students and visibly provokes creative thought and activity on their part. How much more exciting it is when a theory-based technique can be seen as a concrete example of how the learning process is "supposed to work," when success in learning appears obvious and immediate in one's students. I had such an experience this summer in a bilingual ESL class I teach for Cambodian adults at East Boston's Harborside Community Center.

This class of ten Cambodians, mostly women, is funded by a grant from the Lotus Corporation. Most of the students in the class have shown repeated failure to progress in traditional ESL settings. All suffer from a significant lack of self-esteem regarding their productive abilities in the context of U.S. society in general and regarding their ability to effectively achieve any mastery of the English language in particular. The overall goal of the class is to enable students to function more comfortably in their present (East Boston) social and cultural surroundings. Underlying all my attempts to teach the students practical English communication are the aims of improving students' self-esteem and confidence in their learning and other abilities, and giving a voice and validation to their personal experiences in both Cambodia and the U.S.

The Reading

In a unit aimed at improving literacy and fostering parent-child shared reading, the "Lotus class" read an edited, "simplified" version of Robert McCloskey's classic children's book *Make Way for Ducklings*. Here's an example of how the story was simplified:

(Original prose) When they got to Boston, they felt too tired to fly any further.

There was a nice pond in the Public Garden, with a little island on it. "The very place to spend the night," quacked Mr. Mallard. So down they flapped.

(Simplified prose)When they got to Boston, they were too tired. There was a nice pond in the Public Garden. There was an island in the pond. Mr. Mallard quacked, "This is a nice place to sleep tonight." So they landed.

I found the editing necessary due to the high degree of colloquial, idiomatic language in the book. This would hardly be a problem for even marginally literate native English-speaking children and adults. However, even after editing, the prose was extremely difficult for these ESL learners. The difficulty persisted despite extensive pre-reading activities, constant encouragement to predict and guess at the direction of the story line, and extensive use of illustrations and Khmer translation and paraphrases. There are several reasons for this difficulty. One is a strong tendency for the Lotus students to absolutely refuse to guess at the possible meanings of words or to use a prediction of the direction of the narrative as a basis for hypothesizing the content of a difficult sentence. Students refuse such leaps of faith in part simply because they are very afraid of making a mistake. They believe this will just show the teacher, once again, that they are "no good, and can't learn anything." Most of the students are at least nominally familiar with the Cambodian alphabet and its very predictable and regular symbol-to-sound correspondences. They are horribly confused and hopelessly perplexed, however, by the myriad possible symbol-to-sound irregularities of English orthography. Relatedly, the students believe that "true" reading involves an audible, word-by-word, sound-by-sound decoding in which the sound of a word must instantly give way to comprehension of the word and its place in the larger whole of a sentence or narrative. This belief in fact prevents the students from actually *reading*. Recognizing words by shape and not by letter-by-letter decoding, predicting coming words, or using a prediction of the possible direction of the narrative as a tool for guessing at the content of a sentence or phrase is seen by the students as "cheating." When they "catch themselves" making use of these strategies, the students are only further convinced that they are incompetent and worthless as readers.

Despite these difficulties, I was able to "trick" the students into learning to recognize on sight a few phrases and clusters of words, which enabled them to move through the story a bit more smoothly; among these were "ducklings," "Mr. and Mrs. Mallard," "island," "look for/find," "take care (of ducklings)," and "cross the road." The actual narrative, sketched out in Khmer by me and underscored by the book's wonderful illustrations, was an instant hit with the students. On one level, immediate parallels were made by students between Mr. and Mrs. Mallard's plight and Cambodian folktales. On a deeper, philosophical level, the students saw in the story the lot of humans in their struggle to prosper and provide a safe haven for their families. Here's one student's spoken observations, as translated from Khmer:

> You know, teacher, I believe this really happened...the story of the ducks is not so different from our story! We couldn't provide for our families safely in Cambodia, so we moved on, moved on some more, until we came here. We're all just looking for a comfortable place, out of danger, where we can stay fed...human life is just like that!"

Interestingly, there was one prediction as to the direction of the narrative that the women in my class were very confident of: that Mr. Mallard, leaving to explore upriver for a week, was in fact abandoning his wife and children and would never return. Even when it later became evident that they were wrong about him, they continued to express their displeasure at his week-long absence. The women were sure he had gone off to meet some other female duck, and spoke very strongly of their disapproval (and familiarity) with such male infidelity and irresponsibility.

The Field Trip

In a joint venture with two other ESL teachers at Harborside, this simplified version of *Make Way for Ducklings* was also read in their ESL Level I and Level III classes and with my regular ESL Level II class. A field trip was then arranged for students and their children from these classes, as well as from my Lotus class, to the Public Garden to ride the swan boats and tour at least a portion of the ducks' route, including the bronze duck statues erected in honor of the book. The actual trip, a huge enjoyment for all, included a visit to the State House as well, though this expansion of the itinerary was primarily to use the bathrooms! The outing was not only enjoyed for aesthetic reasons; it deeply impressed many of the students that we had in fact read a story which took place in real-life surroundings one could visit and which involved activities one could actually become a participant in. The fact that someone had actually seen fit to erect statues of the characters from the book also left a big impression on students.

Finally, coincidence (or perhaps Providence) intervened on our swan-boat ride to form perhaps the

strongest single link between meaningful text and meaningful experience of the outing: as the boat rounded the small island featured in the story, I stood up and announced in English, Spanish, Khmer, and Vietnamese (all languages spoken by students in our classes) that this was in fact the place where "Mr. and Mrs. Mallard and the ducklings sleep every night." At that moment, a female duck popped up from the bushes on the island and waddled into the water along with other previously concealed (sleeping?) ducks; all began to swim after our boat, also echoing the story.

Ride the boat around the island.
We saw the ducks on the island and near the water.
We saw the ducks sleep on the island.

The LEA Project

The next week in class, in order to capitalize on the experience/text links forged by our field trip, and in an attempt to put a favorite "theory" into "practice," I initiated a Language Experience Approach (LEA) project with my Lotus students. In this approach, students' own experiences form the basis for the narrative of a class-penned story. Furthermore, the students' own words, recorded verbatim by the teacher without regard for grammatical "correctness," form the text of the story. The goal here is an eminently readable story through which the students might practice extracting meaning from text: it is after all *their* language which makes up the text (i.e., their current version of English), and *their* meaning. Here, the ultimate previous-knowledge-to-text relationship exists, a pre-condition essential for effective reading.

To begin, we reviewed (especially for the benefit of the students who did not go on the field trip) photographs of the outing taken by the ESL III teacher, Alan Shute. This precipitated a very lively, excited class discussion in Khmer through which the students who had gone to the Public Garden went on and on about the surprises and delights of the trip. Next, I announced that we were going to write our own book based on our trip. Naturally, this announcement was met by groans of "No, teacher, we're no good, we can't even read, we can't remember our ABC's, I don't know how to write anything, I have no knowledge of anything like that," etc. But we persevered. We first titled the story (in Khmer), and I laid out a skeleton outline of the major events of the day, dictated to me by the students, in Khmer on the blackboard. This took the last half of one day's two-hour class and about one-third of the next day's.

I then erased the Khmer outline (which had been recorded on paper by my co-teacher, Roeuth San, for reference as needed) and asked students to outline the major events of the day in English. With the Khmer story skeleton fresh in the students' minds, and available for consultation if necessary, the students had a general direction. Through much encouragement and supplied English translations of Khmer terms, an English narrative of the day's events slowly emerged from the students. As different students hesitantly and shyly pieced together each sentence, I wrote every word verbatim on the blackboard. While we consulted the Khmer outline frequently for the first several key events, as the story progressed we referred to it less and less, and only when students drew a total "blank." As various sections of the story were completed in English (the meeting of teachers and students and their children at the "T" station to begin the field trip, the train ride to Boston, the swan boat ride, the visit to (and riding of!) the duck statues, the trip to the State House), I read them aloud several times for the students, and then led them in reading aloud chunks of sentences and finally whole sentences. We took frequent breaks to discuss individual phrases in context, including comprehension questions using wording close to or identical with the students' wording in the sentences. Only when I was comfortable with the students' nominal command of and familiarity with a section would I move on to more composition. This process took two and a half full two-hour class days.

To my surprise, the students veered the narrative toward the fantastic (or at least the anthropomorphic) after the story line brought us to the State House. In actuality, at that point in the field trip I decided to leave the students with my co-teacher, Roeuth, who, like the students, lives in East Boston. It was agreed Roeuth would ride the subway with the students back to East Boston, and I would continue on to my home in Somerville. When composing the story, however, several students suggested that my behavior strangely paralleled that of Mr. Mallard leaving the family for an upriver excursion, and stated that I was in fact also "abandoning my wife and children." This plot twist was dutifully included in the LEA version of the field trip, along with a coda that found me, the next week, standing alone in our classroom at Harborside waiting for students who would never show up, in an attempt at "revenge" at their irresponsible teacher/father! This creativity and playfulness showed, to my great delight,

the degree to which the students had warmed up to the LEA process and finally accepted the power and responsibility of actually creating a text. Here's the full text of our LEA story:

> *The Teacher Teaches the Students About Where the Ducks Live:* First time, we stand wait in Maverick Station. Go to train go change train Government Center. Go to the upstairs go to Park. Go to cross bridge and go to buy tickets. Go in the boat. Ride the boat around the island. We saw the ducks on the island and near the water. We saw the ducks sleep on the island. Ride boat the teacher takes the picture from the bridge. Come back to the boat dock. Go to see the Mrs. Mallard and duckling statues. Take a picture Mrs. Mallard. Teacher ride Mrs. Mallard and kids ride ducklings. Next go to the State House. We are go to bathroom. Teacher go out like Mr. Mallard. Leave Mrs. Mallard and ducklings. Teacher wait in school. Students no come to school.

The Book

Next, I assembled a "book" to contain the LEA story, complete with a cover featuring the title in Khmer. I devoted each page to one to three sentences (comprising discrete events or episodes in the story), and drew an illustration for each page. At the point of the story's humorous ending, I indicated in my illustrations the anthropomorphic turn of the narrative: suddenly, Roeuth, the students, and I were seen with human heads and duck bodies, as I waved goodbye in my "abandonment" of them. On the final page, I can be seen, returned to full human form, crying alone in an empty classroom, whose clock clearly indicates my students are not going to show up for class. (The illustrations for this article are selected pages from our book.)

In subsequent classroom use, the booklet proved a huge success. By-now familiar sight words and phrases ("stand wait," "change train," "cross bridge," "ride the boat," and "take the picture") enabled students to move much more quickly through the text of an entire story, both reading silently and aloud. The improved confidence of most students in reading aloud—for them, the ultimate and telling measure of "reading ability"—was very striking. Prediction, though still resisted, improved. Just as important, though, there was a feeling of pride and accomplishment among the students in having actually created a book, in having authored an account of events so close and personal (and enjoyable) to them. Students reported enthusiastically sharing their books with their small children at home. All brought the books to school religiously every day in the final week of class that followed.

Perhaps most striking to me was the change in attitude and performance of one student, a woman who seemed to me to possess the lowest self-esteem and least confidence in her knowledge and classroom ability of all students when the class began. This woman began to study her book at home every night with fervor, and was in fact very disappointed on the last day of class when I surprised the students with a party: "You mean we're not going to study the duck story today? But I studied so hard last night—I was ready, I know all the answers!"

Frank Smith teaches ESL at the Harborside Community School in East Boston and works as a Home-School Parent Liaison Worker for the Parent Information Center in Chelsea. (1991)

Sharing Strategies on ESL Survival Literacy

By Patricia Ryan

First published October 1984

In addition to the oral survival language I teach my very beginning Indo-Chinese ESL students, there are important survival words that these adults need to be able to recognize in written form. Among these sight words are EXIT, ENTRANCE, ENTER, CLOSED, OPEN, WOMEN, LADIES, MEN, RESTROOMS, POISON, POLICE, FIRE, etc. While knowledge of phonics and word patterns is useful for learning to decode unfamiliar words, certain words are amenable to rote memorization and recognition as whole words. I have found that one aspect of working with absolute beginning adult ESL students is to employ a large number of ways to teach the same thing so that the students are repeatedly exposed to and practice the language item. The following four activities are techniques I use after building up recognition of several sight words in context using flash cards. Each day as I teach a new lesson and write three or four more sight words on a big sheet of paper, we review all the words learned to date. When we have about twenty or so words, we play games using the words.

Word List—I divide the class into two teams. One student goes up to the list of words, and a student from the other team "reads" a word from the list. The student at the list must point to the word and read it. Then s/he must demonstrate the meaning of the word in some way. If the demonstration is correct, the team gets a point. Then they switch: A student from the second team goes to the list and the roles alternate.

Concentration—This game requires small flash cards, each with a sight word printed on it. I usually print numbers or letters of the alphabet at the top of each card, too. Two sets of these cards are needed to play the game. The cards are arranged face down on the floor or table where all students can see. The object is for the students to match sight words. One student turns one card over and then another. If the two words match, the student must read the sight word and demonstrate the meaning. A student keeps the pair and gets another turn if the words match. If the words do not match, both words are turned face down again, and another student turns over two cards seeking a match. It is important that all the students see each word as it is turned over so that s/he can remember what and where each word is. A variation of this is to make one set of sight word cards and another set of pictures that represent the sight words.

Bingo—This is another way of practicing recognition of sight words. One way is to make up cards with the sight words printed for the students. Another way is to mimeograph or copy a bingo grid, write the list of words on the blackboard for the students and have them make their own bingo cards by printing the words in any spaces they want on their grid. As I call out words, each student places markers on the words on the grids, and the first student to get BINGO must read the sight words and demonstrate an understanding.

Board Game—On a large white sheet of newsprint or poster board, I have made a path divided into squares. It could look like a monopoly board, or the path could be circular or wind around the board. I have written sight words, including months and days, on the board. Some squares are marked NO PARKING (go back 2 spaces), FREE, GO AHEAD (advance 2 squares), etc. The first student to play rolls a die twice, adds up the numbers, moves a marker that many squares, and reads the sight word on that square. As in the other games, the student must demonstrate the meaning of the word by acting it out, pointing it out on the calendar, etc. These games work well in my classes: that is, the students enjoy and look forward to them, considerable learning takes place, and the interaction is valuable. Although these games are simple and familiar, they are also effective and useful.

Patricia Ryan teaches the lowest and highest ESL levels at Employment Connections Inc. in Chelsea. She has used the preceding literacy activities in the Thai and Philippine Indo-Chinese Refugee Processing Centers as well as in classes in the U.S. (1984)

Helping Students Become Storytellers

By Gregory A. Goodmacher

First published May 1991

I want to stretch and challenge my students' storytelling and writing abilities by helping them creatively use English to make connections between persons, places, times and events. My intermediate students already can describe pictures of people, animals, places and other things fairly well. I have learned that a task of connecting four or more separate pictures into a single story challenges students, creates group interaction, and stimulates creative writing.

I told my students that I wanted them to create a story from four separate pictures. At first they were doubtful that they could do this, so I assisted them with their first story. I spread about 40 pictures on the floor of the classroom. I asked four students to pick one picture each, which I taped to the blackboard. I asked my class to tell me something about each picture. The first picture was of a baby on a rug. They told me: "It is happy./The baby is crawling./It is five months old./ It is looking up./It is on the rug./It is wearing diapers." I wrote everything they said under the picture. I did the same with the other pictures, which were of a pair of dancing shoes, a bird flying, and lastly, a photograph of a lake surrounded by mountains.

Now, I told the students I wanted them to connect the picture of the baby with the picture of the bird. Some of my students were confused, so I told them to try and connect some of the sentences which they had given me about the baby. We did this together and came up with, "The happy baby with diapers is crawling on the rug and looking up." Again I asked the students to connect the picture of the bird with the baby. There was silence. I asked what the baby was looking at. Suddenly they understood. The class finished the following story with little guidance.

> The happy baby with diapers is crawling on the rug and looking at a white bird with a black head and red beak. Near the baby is a pair of dancing shoes. The bird is flying in the sky. The bird is flying over the mountain. It is looking for fish in the lake.

Then, I put them in groups of three. Each group chose four pictures for a new story. I floated from group to group giving encouragement and answering grammar and spelling questions. Students shared vocabulary, expressed ideas in English, and corrected themselves as they worked on their stories. One student wrote for each group. Near the end of class, each group stood at the front of the class, showed their pictures and read their stories out loud. The other students listened attentively to their classmates' stories.

It was fun for me to hear how my students creatively connected persons, places, and events. An old photograph of Clark Gable kissing Lana Turner became "John and Susan fall in love." It was connected to a picture of a baby with the following two sentences: "They got married in 1985. After one year they have a baby."

My students used words and phrases such as "before," "after," "one year later," "in the summer," and "in the fall" to express changes in time. They used words for family members to connect people in different pictures, and prepositions were used to connect places. One of my students taught the other members of her group the word "meanwhile."

I was very pleased with the creative energy which my students displayed while working on this task. They felt pride in their work, a strong force for continuing language progress.

Gregory A. Goodmacher taught ESL at the YMCA and Jewish Vocational Services. He has just recently moved to California. (1991)

English as a Second Language

Left Tongue/ Right Tongue

By Tomás Mario Kalmar

First published July 1990

A mí me gusta dominar
dos lenguas
aunque a veces I feel
that two tongues is not
what I dominate sino que traigo
en la mera boca two separate tongues
dos pedazos de carne flapping
out of synch

Tocando el acordeón
la guitarra
la flauta
el arpa
means letting
my right hand
and my left hand
dance together
in loving independence
dominando el instrumento
con tanta ternura
que la musiquita
y el ritmo
te llegan hasta el corazón
dándote ganas de llorar
lagrimas de consuelo
dulce
y picante

But my left tongue y su compañera
la lenguita mexicana
can only dance together
bailando tanto suelto como pegado
si me permito a mí mismo
the freedom to switch codes
to play my tongues off against
each other come si fueran
la primera voz y la segunda
singing and yodelling in country harmony
calling and echoing
dando gallo con mi compadre
en la madrugada

cantando for example
La voz de mi madre
al pié de tu ventana
or in the company of Chicanos
reading aloud por ejemplo
The Voice of Fulano

Tomás Kalmar is the Biliteracy Specialist at the A.L.R.I. (1990)

THOUGHTS ON SURVIVAL ESL

By John Croes

First published December 1985

Elsa Auerbach (UMass/Boston) and Denise Burgess (Dept. of Migrant Education, Watsonville, CA) have written a very important article, "The Hidden Curriculum of Survival ESL," which appears in the *TESOL Quarterly*, Sept. 1985, and which could provide a timely focus for adult ESL programs' staff meeting discussions. The article examines the rise of survival ESL and the texts that teachers and publishers have produced to teach/facilitate learning of "survival skills," and the overall conclusion is that...

> ...despite the well-meaning and commendable intentions,...there is a great deal of unevenness among texts and within texts....In many cases, survival texts unwittingly present an idealized view of reality, a patronizing attitude toward students, a one-sided approach toward culture, and a model of language acquisition which is only superficially communicative. While attempting to help newcomers to fit into American society, some texts may have the impact of socializing students into roles of subservience.

Moreover, they find, many of these "survival skills" texts help us present lessons that, on closer examination, continue the powerless dependence that characterizes many limited English speakers' relationship to formal education. For those *All Write News* readers who do not have access to *TESOL Quarterly*, the next few paragraphs detail the above conclusions, followed by some of my own thoughts.

The authors illustrate how the texts misrepresent reality in myriad ways. Survival ESL students are unlikely to encounter many of the situations modeled in these texts: doctors who will see a patient on a moment's notice, loan officers who will hand over the loan in a week, or apartments featuring beautiful river views and dining rooms. A unit on employment that implies that looking and behaving appropriately at the interview and filling out the application neatly will secure the job also misrepresents reality.

Exclusion is another source of distortion. Exclusion of such things as landlords' obligations, courses of action to take with housing problems, and housing or job discrimination serves to insufficiently prepare immigrant adults for reality. In an effort to help immigrants find jobs and rectify on-the-job problem areas, vocational ESL lessons prescribe subservience, obedience and conflict avoidance and exclude the realities of racial discrimination, cultural misunderstandings and the abilities to complain, disagree and refuse.

A second major failing in survival texts that the authors point out is the "one-way" cultural indoctrination that the lessons lead to. Despite professed efforts to respect the adult learner, many of the texts fail to present lesson ideas that show respect for and sensitivity to adults. Few foster comparisons of cultures and practices, which would validate and build upon the successful and competent life experiences that the adult immigrants bring to America. In fact, some actually trivialize demeaning situations like having to start with entry level jobs despite extensive educational and employment backgrounds.

While survival ESL has brought life skills content to previously grammar-oriented instruction, the au-

thors also criticize the texts they examined for merely masking the old with the new. Besides the unrealistic language of much of the dialog models, they also question the pedagogic effectiveness of drills in the guise of communicative activities.

Finally, they point out the difference between problem-solving and problem-posing. They see the former in life skills curriculums and texts that prescribe "chunks" of language that the learner can be taught and later spit out to solve problems s/he encounters. The learner becomes dependent on the teacher/text to identify coping needs and prescribe solutions. Problem-posing, on the other hand, encourages the learners to identify the problems themselves and to work together to investigate alternatives.

"The Hidden Curriculum of Survival ESL" is, in my view, a valuable reminder to teachers and curriculum developers—whether we adapt/adopt books, borrow pieces from here and there, or make up our own materials and lessons—of the need to be constantly and consistently vigilant over what we are presenting and how we are presenting it. The article points out that a few texts handle particular issues well but others poorly. I would add that any of the material in any of the books can be used to advantage through thoughtful planning. Clearly, "good" books are preferable, but even "bad" material can provoke useful discussion. As the authors note, one text passes up the opportunity to conduct meaningful discussion of employment issues and alternatives by asking instead "Why do refugees have to start their jobs at the bottom?" Conscientious teachers thoughtfully preparing lessons with their students' situations and needs in mind can use any material to stimulate group-building, thought and discussion of alternatives.

Nina Wallerstein demonstrated a process of learning students' needs when she provided workshops to the ESL staff in the Philippines during the time I worked there. What impressed me most were not her workshops for the staff on problem-posing but rather her way of "listening" to the refugees. She continually stressed in her workshops the need to listen to the students, and she did this by observing and talking with them in their community outside of class. She rapidly came to know more about the refugees' here-and-now situations in the processing center than many of the staff knew: the actual communication problems in the clinics, the food delivery delays, the anxiety over "lost" mail at the post office, the brutality of the "monkey house" (jail). It is this kind of "listening" that forms the basis of the problem-posing "codes" that she illustrates in *Language and Culture in Conflict* and of the curriculums of some of the ALI programs. The knowledge gained from this kind of listening is what makes "uneven," "patronizing," "superficial" and inaccurate materials useful and useable.

Another of my enduring impressions from my work with Southeast Asian refugees in the processing centers was the refugees' powerlessness over their own lives at that point. While the ESL educational experiences we provided did teach and improve the refugees' English and knowledge about America, the classes did not enable them to learn how to learn independently and to take responsibility for their own learning. Rather we turned them out of A,B,C,D, and E levels and sent them to America to be picked up by Levels 1,2, and 3 which would give them more of the same. Yet nowhere along the line have I seen the language learning tools transferred to the students. Among these tools are drills, which Auerbach and Burgess correctly indict as superficial and non-communicative; but as a language learner, I can attest also to the value of the drills as purely mnemonic devices, especially when I devise them myself. Without them, I can't retain the new target language to even begin to communicate, let alone to discuss problems. Language learners need these mechanisms, not in the name of "communication" but as learning tools to facilitate memory and smoothness. The tools are much more valuable in the hands of the learners, however, and I believe that just as students need to learn study skills we need to teach students how to devise their own drills, employ other language learning strategies and use the community as their classroom in order to free them from dependence on teachers, classes and texts.

Led by texts and curriculums and limited in time and energy for preparation, we teachers and curriculum developers may unwittingly present lessons that idealize, misrepresent, indoctrinate and suppress. Hopefully, "The Hidden Curriculum of Survival ESL" will lead to some productive problem-posing discussions on the staff level as well as in the classrooms.

John Croes is the ESL Specialist at the A.L.R.I. (1985)

Shoes, Glorious Shoes: A Teaching Strategy

By Charlotte B. Knox

First published January 1991

As a teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL), occasionally my imagination runs dry. When that happens, I pull out my "shoe collection"—actual shoes or pictures of shoes that I have cut out of magazines and had laminated.

It's not that I'm a foot fetishist; it's simply that shoes make wonderful visual aids. A beat-up work boot, a high-heeled sandal, a sneaker, a loafer with a hole in it, a baby shoe—each readily conjures up a story, the story of the person to whom the shoe belongs. Because shoes have a certain anonymity (unlike dolls or photographs of people), students of different ages, races, and nationalities can "relate" to them and thus find it easier to talk about them. A work boot, for example, might inspire a story about a construction worker or a farmer. Group the work boot with a woman's pump and a child's sneaker or galosh and you have a "family" which a class can discuss for several sessions. In addition to stimulating conversation, shoes used in this way can teach you about your students—their cultural stereotypes, their ways of looking at the world.

Here are some suggestions for your venture into "shoe business": Bring in a shoe or a picture of a shoe. Using the five "W" questions (who, what, why, where, when), get your students to bring the shoe to life: What kind of shoe is this? Whose shoe is it? Where has it been? When was it worn last? Why is it not being worn now? Once the shoe's history has been established, you can create as simple or complex a story as necessary to achieve your teaching goals. I have used shoes with low literacy level classes (to review the present tense), as well as with advanced language classes.

Example (for use with low literacy students): Bring in three or four different types of shoes and have students vote on the shoe they want to talk and write about. Generate conversation by asking, "Is this a man's shoe? A baby's shoe? A woman's shoe?" Next, have the class name the person to whom the shoe belongs. On the board or on a large pad of paper, write the name: John. Then start asking other questions about John, writing questions and answers on the board:

1. Who is John?
   1. John is a man.
2. How old is John?
   2. John is 55 years old.
3. What is John's job?
   3. John is a taxi driver.
4. What color is John's shoe?
   4. John's shoe is black.
5. Is John's shoe new?
   5. No, John's shoe is old.
6. Where does John live?
   6. John lives in the city, 22 Pine St.
7. Why is John not wearing his shoe?
   7. John is not wearing his shoe because he is sleeping.
8. When is John going to wake up?
   8. John is going to wake up at 7:00.

At the next session, ask the students the questions on the board again and have them read the answers aloud. Then hand out sheets, as follows, and have them fill in the missing word or words:

1. Name of the shoe owner _____
2. Age _____
3. Occupation _____
4. Address _____

This not only tests comprehension, but gives them the opportunity to fill out the kind of form they may encounter in applying for jobs or housing.

Finally, read the entire story aloud to the students, with the numbers. (Since most students are familiar with numbers, numbering the sentences helps them follow along.)

1. John is a man.
2. John is 55 years old.
3. John is a taxi driver., etc.

If they are able, have the students read the story aloud with you.

For more advanced classes, try groups of shoes. Just think: The shoe you save might be a future language lesson!

Charlotte B. Knox teaches ESL at SCALE in Somerville (which is now rumored to stand for Shoe-Centered Adult Learning Environment). (1991)

Teaching Math

SHARING STRATEGIES: MATH WORD PROBLEMS

By Mary Jane Schmitt

First published February 1985

Last issue's "Information-Sharing Question" was "What are the best materials you know of for helping students learn to understand and solve math word problems?" Although there are plenty of word problems in the math workbooks available at the Cambridge Community Learning Center, and most adult learning centers, the problems are not organized in a pedagogically sound way. This article describes a plan which has proven successful in teaching word problems with whole numbers and money to an ABE/pre-GED population.

We use the following "8 Step Plan" to provide the student with plenty of *experiences* with each of the four operations and to give the student many chances to learn to make *decisions* about which operation to use. We also developed a study guide which correlates this "8 Step Plan" with six math workbooks you probably already have on your shelves. Where there is little or no suitable material, we've made our own worksheets.

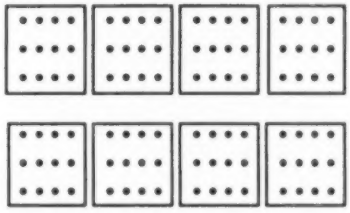
Step 1. You ADD when you want to find the TOTAL. Provide the student with many *situations* where s/he has to total. Examples would be shopping bills, restaurant bills, or total calorie intake for the day. Then provide the student with a usual variety of addition word problems. Make sure the vocabulary is consistent with the student's reading level.

Step 2. You SUBTRACT when you want to find what's LEFT. Provide the student with real *situations* where s/he has to find what's left. Examples here are figuring change, withdrawing money from a savings account, or figuring take home pay. You SUBTRACT when you want to find out how much OLDER, HIGHER, LARGER, or MORE one thing is than another. In other words you want to find the *difference* between two amounts. Provide the student with situations where s/he is asked to *compare* two amounts, for example: populations, lengths, or ages. Provide the usual variety of subtraction word problems which mix the idea of what's *left* with the idea of *difference/*

comparison.

Step 3. Now it's time for the student to start *making decisions.* S/he must ask, should I add or subtract? Provide the student with sets of word problems which randomly mix one-step addition problems with one-step subtraction problems. We must cut from the books we have and paste them together to get this random mix. None of the books (except for *Number Power 6)* makes a decent attempt at mixing up addition and subtraction. Ask the student to read the problems, putting an "A" where s/he wants to add for the total and an "S" where s/he wants to find what's left or the difference between two amounts.

Step 4. You MULTIPLY when you want to find the TOTAL *and* you want to ADD the same thing over and over. Provide the student with situations where s/he can use multiplication to shorten a repeated addition. Example: Find the cost of 5 cans of soda @ 60 cents per can. Talk about how 60+60+60+60+60 becomes 60 X 5. You MULTIPLY when you know the cost of ONE and want to find the cost of MANY. Here provide more typical shopping situations. Once again give the student the usual variety of multiplication word problems. Make sure that s/he visualizes the repeated addition. For example: "A case contains 12 bottles of ketchup. How many bottles are there in 8 cases?"



12 + 12 + 12 + 12 + 12 + 12 + 12 + 12 = ? Now, make it shorter: 12 X 8 = 96. Or, from another angle: twelve, eight *times.*

Step 5. Time now for the student to make decisions as to which of the three—addition, subtraction, or multiplication—operations is appropriate. Make worksheets which randomly mix your typical word problems for these operations. (Cut and paste time again.) If the student has problems at this step, you will be able to tell which operation is unclear and reteach that.

Step 6. You DIVIDE when you want to CUT something up into equal pieces. Provide situations such as splitting a dinner bill equally, or figuring weekly pay when given an annual salary. You DIVIDE when you know the cost of MANY and want to find the cost of ONE. Provide situations like simple unit pricing where the student's challenge is to find the "better buy." You DIVIDE when you want to find HOW MANY of one thing are contained in something else. Provide situations such as: How many $.29 pens can you buy with $4.50? Provide lots of the "usual variety" of division word problems. Again sketch out the division to help the student visualize the process. For example: "6 cans of tonic cost $3.42. What's the cost per can?"

3.42 (for all) ▪ ▪ ▪ .57 .57 .57 / .57 .57 .57 thus

$$6\overline{)3.42}\quad .57$$

Step 7. Now the decision for the student is the choice between multiplication and division. Again it's time to cut and paste. Randomly mix these two kinds of problems. Make sure the student really understands that you multiply when you know one and want many, but you divide when you know many and want one: Keywords here include "each," "per," and "every."

Step 8. The final step is for the student to *confidently* decide which of the four operations is appropriate in a one- or two-step word problem. There shouldn't be any wild guesses at this stage. Many of the books mix the four operations, but you may want to make some sheets of problems for practice.

The chart we use as a study guide correlates pages in the most commonly-used math workbooks with the above eight steps. (These workbooks are: *Using Dollars and Sense,* Fearon/Pitman; *Working Makes Sense,* Fearon/Pitman; *Number Power 1,* Contemporary; *Basic Skills/Whole Numbers,* Cambridge; *Pre-GED Exercise Book in Math Skills,* Cambridge; and *Number Power 6,* Contemporary.) *Using Dollars and Sense* and *Working Makes Sense* have the most basic situations, like making change or totalling a grocery bill, while the rest have the more typical word problems.

Mary Jane Schmitt teaches math and develops curriculum at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge. (1985)

Why I Hate Story Problems

By David J. Rosen

First published September 1992

For years I have known, but not been able to pinpoint, why I hate story problems, even the most interesting and creative of them. In a workshop at a national conference I recently attended in Savannah, Georgia, as I worked with other adults to solve a problem involving the use of the Pythagorean theorum, I realized what my objections are.

Anne, a math teacher in a very successful West Coast youth conservation corps which tries to integrate youth service corpsmembers' work and academic learning, gave our "class" of adults at the workshop a story problem which she has used successfully with young adults in her math classes. The problem went something like this:

> Susan—you know Susan, the Corps Administrative Secretary—is married to Al. Al is an artist. He paints huge canvasses, sometimes as big as 10' square. Al is building a new studio, and he wants to make the door big enough so he can get his biggest canvasses through it. How tall and wide should the door be?

My co-operative learning partner, Carolyn from Newark, New Jersey, and I discussed the problem. Carolyn suggested that maybe he could go through the door with a rolled-up canvas and then frame it on the outside. Not a bad idea I thought. Then she pointed out that the door had to be at least 36" wide, at least if it was going to pass inspection in Newark. Again, an important piece of information not contained in the story problem.

The "right" answer turned out to be six feet wide, and eight feet tall. With these dimensions, the hypotenuse of the right triangle formed by the width and height would be ten feet, and if the canvas were carried at an angle, it could pass through.

Carolyn pointed out that this would be one costly solution to Al's problem, and that the six-foot wide door might have to be a french style door, which would be even more expensive. I thought that the ten foot hypotenuse wasn't quite wide enough, that a 10' canvas would have its corners scraped going through.

But we felt that these observations didn't count, because this wasn't really a problem-solving session. There was a story problem to be solved. Story problems are the antithesis of real problems. They are carefully constructed narratives which require the use of certain information, certain formulae, or certain aspects of mathematical reasoning. They are designed to help one practice a mathematical concept or a set of related concepts.

This experience in Savannah helped me to realize that I have several complaints about this instructional strategy. First, many teachers tell their students that these problems are real-life problems, and sometimes go so far as to justify the study of mathematics by saying these are the kinds of problems one will find "out there in the real world." And, of course, many students know that this just isn't so.

Second, in order to solve the problem, one has to know what mathematical tool or operation to apply: multiplication, division, finding the square root, applying the formula to find the circumferance when only given the radius, and so forth. Story problems might be useful for students who have learned several good mathematical tools, and need to practice which ones apply where. However, they are not a good way—no matter how "real" or "contextual"—to introduce a mathematical concept which one needs to apply but which one hasn't yet learned.

Finally, I object on literary grounds. My reaction to nearly every math story problem I have read, is "who cares?" Who cares which car arrives first? Who cares which brother is older?

Instead, for those who would make mathematics "real" and "meaningful" (and I hope there are many math teachers who want to do this) I would urge setting up problems which are as real-to-life as possible and which have more than one solution, all of which "count." In the problem above, for example, someone might suggest hinging the canvas frame so that it could be folded in half and go through any door at least five feet tall. This might lead to a discussion of what bending a canvas in half might do to the paint, and if it would make a difference in what medium the canvas were painted. (Perhaps some kinds of paint would crack if the canvas were folded; others might not?)

If using the Pythagorean theorum is one possible way to solve the problem, but not a very appealing one compared to the others (a six foot wide door!), and if one's goal as a teacher is to help students understand how to apply the Pythagorean theorum, then one has to come up with another problem—a more real-to-life one in which the use of this theorum is an elegant solution. This is the teacher's challenge!

(Incidentally, Lea Campola, a math teacher at Youthbuild, a youth corps in Boston which does carpentry and building rehabilitation work, uses the carpenter's problem of calculating the length of the stringer (the hypotenuse of the triangle formed by the height of the staircase—the total rise— and the base—or total run,) when one is given the total rise and total run. And, indeed one can find the use of Pythagoras' theorum in Graham Blackburn's *Illustrated Interior Carpentry*, and in other books, as a good solution to this common carpenter's problem. The A.L.R.I. Library has recently acquired some of the books recommended by Lea Campola which can assist teachers who want to integrate mathematics and building trades skills, especially carpentry.)

David Rosen is the Director of the A.L.R.I. (1992)

Math Notes: Did You Know...?

By Helen Jones

First published March 1989

Many teachers are looking for ways to help their students learn the times tables. Without a solid memory base of multiplication facts, virtually everything that comes after that in math will be more difficult than it has to be. Division, for example, requires you to pull basic multiplication facts from your memory. If the facts aren't there, division becomes unnecessarily frustrating. And *any* work with fractions requires some facility in multiplication and division. Take this addition problem, for example: 1/6 + 1/8 = ?. Even though you may have learned the *procedure*, finding the lowest common denominator in order to carry out the addition becomes an intimidating task if you don't know that the number 24 appears in both the 6's table and the 8's table.

A good grasp of the basic multiplication facts, or times tables, is essential for minimizing math frustration and maximizing math success. Most multiplication tables have a pattern that's easier to learn than a list of individual facts. For example, in the 2's table, all the answers end in an even number (either 0,2,4,6, or 8). Students can practice counting by 2's, by 10's, by 5's, etc. In the 5's table, all the answers end in either 5 or 0, and in the 10's table all the answers end in 0. The 9's table often gives students a lot of trouble, until they learn one of these "tricks":

• Notice the ascending pattern of the first digit and the descending pattern of the second digit, in the answers to the 9's table:

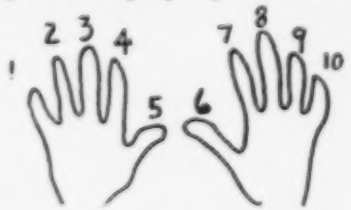
0 9
1 8
2 7
3 6
4 5
5 4
6 3
7 2
8 1
9 0

• The digits in the answer always add up to 9. Examples:

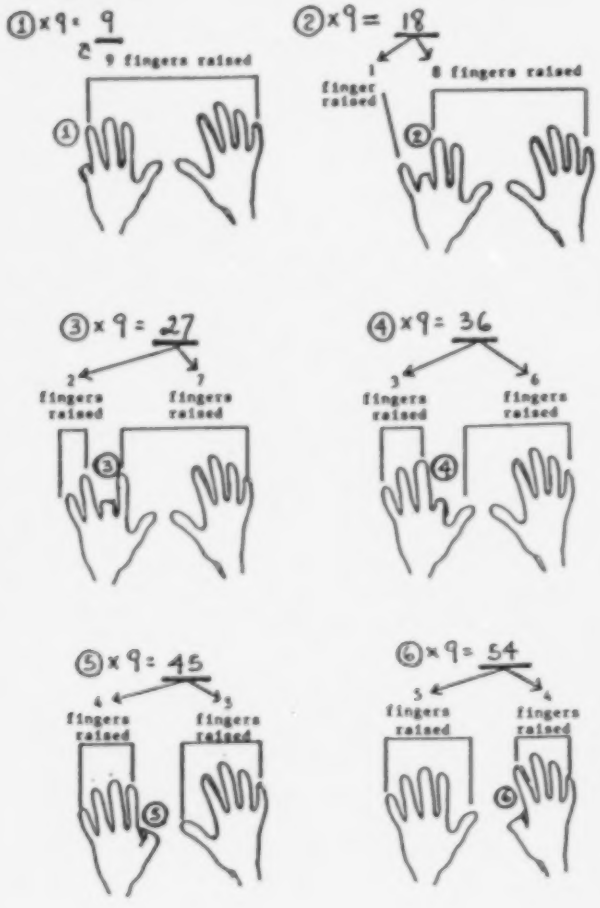
1 x 9 = 9
2 x 9 = 18 (1 + 8 = 9)
3 x 9 = 27 (2 + 7 = 9)
4 x 9 = 36 (3 + 6 = 9)
5 x 9 = 45 (4 + 5 = 9)
6 x 9 = 54 (5 + 4 = 9)
7 x 9 = 63 (6 + 3 = 9)
8 x 9 = 72 (7 + 2 = 9)
[Finish the pattern]
9 x 9 = (+ = 9)
10 x 9= (+ = 9)

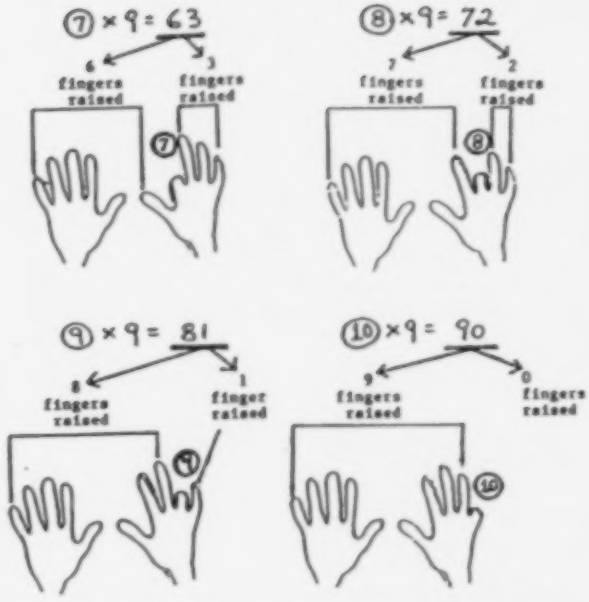
(This doesn't work beyond 10 x 9, but the 11's table has a pattern of its own. If you don't already know it, see if you can figure out what it is.)

• Some students like the so-called "finger method." Hold your hands out in front of you, palms out, thumbs in. Give each finger a number. Left pinky is #1, left ring finger is #2, left middle is #3, left index is #4, left thumb #5, right thumb #6, right index #7, right middle #8, right ring #9, and right pinky #10. (See diagram.)



For any " __ times 9" problem, simply fold down the finger whose number matches the number you want to multiply 9 by. Then, count how many fingers you still have raised to the *left* of your folded finger, and how many fingers are still raised to the *right* of it. The number of fingers raised to the *left* becomes the *first* digit in your answer and the number of fingers to the *right* becomes the *second* digit. It's easier to show than to describe:





Helen Jones is the ABE Specialist at the A.L.R.I. (1989)

Student Assessment

For ABE Teachers and Students: Tests That Don't Defeat

By Greg Leeds

First published March 1989

I hear over and over that the TABE and ABLE tests are not effective. Students hear, "The test doesn't mean anything, but we have to do it. Don't worry about your score." And teachers keep complaining, "What I teach isn't on the test."

For me the standardized tests are ineffective for numerous reasons. They provide teachers with little information. They do not show how students think, what students need or what kinds of errors they make. The tests do not recognize many strengths students have; they only recognize a limited scope of students' literacy.

Tests like the TABE and ABLE do not help students understand their own learning process nor do they directly help students learn. They do not look at the types of questions students ask. They do not recognize the small steps that progress comes in, nor do they recognize many forms of progress.

Damaging Qualities

Standardized tests' most ineffective, actually damaging quality is that they separate teachers and students; they intimidate and they discourage. Typically the standardized tests get harder and harder and leave an abundance of students feeling defeated at the end. Often, if the student is able to finish a standardized test, it means the test was "too low" or "too easy" and a more difficult level must be administered for the "standardization to fit within "effective" limits, within the norms. (Effective for whom? What norms are we fitting our students into?) In other words, for the tests to be accurate, they must be administered till students begin to fail, till they can't go on. Such tests end up reinforcing feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness that many students already experience. As one student told me, "We don't come here to find out that we've failed; we know that already."

The intimidating nature of standardized tests make many students feel small and passive. Few teachers would give these tests if they were not required. The tests force teachers into the threatening and powerful position of administering the test to the testee. We become distant from our students. We are put on the opposing side. The teacher becomes the tester, proctor, administrator, corrector, evaluator, grader, and announcer of the bad news. The judge and executioner. The student fills in the blanks.

There isn't room for these standardized tests in our literacy classrooms. As teachers, we shouldn't allow ourselves to be put in such roles, especially when teachers are coming up with a multitude of other options.

For whose benefit are we doing all this testing? When tests are designed to benefit the student they give students more control of the class and more control of their learning. When tests are designed for the bureaucracy, they lessen students' self-respect and make people feel deficient and powerless.

Options

Wanting to hear about assessment tools that are effective, that are designed for teachers and students, I collected a list from teachers. Here are seven alternatives that teachers have designed to answer the question: "How much progress are we making?"

1) *Keep all of a student's writings in a folder and compare the student's writing samples from time to time.* Teachers look for a variety of qualities, depending on the student's interests and skills: how much a student writes during a class; how their invented spelling has developed; how clear their paragraphs are; how thoroughly ideas are developed; etc. (By the way, invented spelling is a developmental process by which beginning readers and writers use their knowledge of letter-sounds (phonics) to approximate the spelling of words and avoid having their writing limited by the quest for spelling correctness.) One teacher looks at how much of the student's "soul" is expressed in the writing.

2) *Compare the student's journal entries.* Teachers often look at not only the clarity of writing but the types of questions students are exploring and if they are moving beyond "Today I...and then...and then..." One teacher I visited considers, as a criterion for progress, whether students are connecting their own personal issues with local community issues. Another teacher looks at how much students express their own lives as a part of history.

3) *Tape oral readings and compare the error patterns over a period of time.* This is some times referred to as "miscue analysis."

4) *Interview students periodically about their attitudes toward reading and writing.* For example, "Do you see yourself as an author?" "What does writing mean?" "Do you read street signs?" The teacher observes/records how these attitudes change over time.

5) *Record how many books each student has read over a given period of time.*

6) *Interview the student when a test is corrected.* Ask such questions as "When you answer a question like this, how do you go about getting the answer?" This helps students focus on their process and refine it. The teacher and the student learn a lot more about how the student is thinking, what needs to be taught, and how to go about it. They learn a lot more than just finding out that the student got the answer wrong.

7) *Make a list each month of what students can do.* Eventually one teacher turned this list into a survey with such questions as:

A) The student is able to read his/her own writing— i) with assistance; ii) without assistance.

B) The student reads ahead of an unknown word and returns to insert a word which logically fits given the context— i) rarely; ii) sometimes; iii) frequently.

C) The student uses invented spelling— i) rarely; ii) sometimes; iii) frequently.

D) The student is able to suggest revisions on others' writing— i) rarely; ii) sometimes; iii) frequently.

E) The student is able to revise her/his writing, to add or delete text— i) rarely; ii) sometimes; iii) frequently.

F) The student is able to identify problematic situations found in the community and voice alternative solutions— i) rarely; ii) sometimes; iii) frequently.

What's important in these assessment tools is that they allow the teacher to sit down beside the student and explain what they are looking for, what they are finding, and how they're finding it. These assessments allow the teacher to hear what the student's opinion is of the findings and the assessment process. This allows for a lot more precision, more accuracy, and more use of the assessment.

Sharing the Joy of Improvement

I've had students change from not being able to read aloud to reading in front of large audiences without recognizing this change in their skills. It's important for both the teacher and student to recognize this improvement and share the joy of it. Tests rarely show the student this type of improvement.

Furthermore, the importance of these alternative assessments is that they don't just attempt to find out whether or not a student is improving. They try to find out how and why. Often these assessments will tell us which teaching techniques and learning processes are working and which ones are not. But just as often,

especially in the field of adult literacy, other factors that affect learning will be discovered. The best assessment tools unearth these other dimensions of teaching literacy.

Once a student reshaped my assessment of her learning by telling me that her recent progress was due in part to finding day care—her attendance went up and she didn't worry during class about her child. On a separate occasion a young man did poorly on a test and later told his teacher during a post test interview that he couldn't sleep the night before because there were gunshots going off in his neighborhood.

As I collected this growing list of assessment ideas, I realized how many alternatives exist. There are numerous ways to find out if students are learning without using the discouraging standardized tests that show students more of what they don't know than what they do know.

Obsession with Accuracy

Too many times I can remember, as an enrollment coordinator in New York, encouraging a student to keep going on a test. "Try a few more" I'd say, when both the student and I knew he or she was beyond his or her frustration point. What lengths we will go to be accurate in our assessment, to show that the students do their "best" on the test scores! For whom are we doing this acrobatic exercise?

Two interesting notes on language: My thesaurus says that a synonym for "accurate" is "just." And my dictionary defines "assessment" as "to estimate the value; to evaluate...; from the French 'to sit beside.'" The teacher-created methods value the student; the teacher sits beside the student and together they find out what's going on. Standardized forms of evaluation tend to devalue and are isolating. I propose that, in bureaucrats' and our own obsession with assessment and accuracy and controlled sciences, we have perverted assessment's more appropriate and just meanings.

The standardized tests make students feel that they must prove themselves so the program gets funding or for the students to get approval or to make the teacher feel good about him or herself. In some programs students must demonstrate their testing skills to stay in the class or to move on. The tests, and the literacy system that imposes them, turn learners and programs into beggars; asking for little, the students must "pass" in the eyes of the authority to get the few crumbs of adult literacy services that exist.

Greg Leeds is an ABE Specialist at the A.L.R.I. (1989)

An Experiment in Evaluation

By Andy Nash

First published November 1989

After three years, the UMass Family Literacy Project is coming to a close. We have spent these years exploring alternative ways to develop curriculum with learners, evaluate classes, and research our own work. One of our highest priorities has been teacher-sharing. Throughout most of the project, teachers met weekly to share questions, dilemmas, and discoveries from our classes. We believe that this paid staff development time was central to our growth as educators and coworkers. In the spirit of teacher-sharing, I would like to devote this final Family Literacy update to sharing some work I've done with an intermediate ESL class at El Centro del Cardenal. I've chosen to write about a lesson that helped me think about alternative evaluation methods, since many teachers are trying to find or create new assessment tools that: 1) provide more useful information for teachers and students; and 2) include students in the process of setting goals and evaluating their own progress toward those goals. I am interested in alternative evaluation as one way to help teachers and students move toward a more equal sharing of responsibility and authority in the classroom.

However, when I began this "lesson," I was not thinking about evaluation. I had planned an activity that, more generally, would help us think and talk about student/teacher roles. It was near the beginning of the cycle, and my plan was to look at the educational

experiences we had had in our lives and then reflect on the ways we did or didn't want to recreate those in our current classroom. My explicit aim was to reconsider student/teacher roles and the patterns of authority that we carry with us from our childhood classrooms.

We started by looking at a variety of pictures of people learning something. Some of the people were in school, some in other settings; some happy, some miserable; some young, some old. We described the pictures first and then talked about the memories they evoked. We read excerpts from writings other students had done about their educational experiences and wrote our own.

In the next class, those who wished to read their pieces aloud and this stirred further conversation. Taken all together, we had a large number of experiences from which to generalize. But I wasn't quite sure where to go with it next. In the past, I had asked people to write about an imaginary ideal class, but this had failed for many reasons (it's difficult to imagine on demand, fear of challenging the teacher's model, etc.). I decided, quite spontaneously, to divide the class into groups and asked them to make two lists: one to complete the phrase, "It's easy to learn when...." and the other to finish "It's hard to learn when...." When they were done, volunteers copied their group's contributions onto newsprint. Here are some of their responses:

It's easy to learn when....
- we have a good teacher
- the teacher is a good person
- we forget our problems
- we pay attention
- the class is friendly and interesting

It's hard to learn when....
- the teacher pushes you to learn
- people laugh at you
- we don't understand
- we have many problems
- we don't have time

I was pleased with the activity. Because I had asked about learning in general and not about individual experiences, people spoke of socio-economic as well as emotional and personal barriers to learning. They put learning in a social context that reminded us that the lives people lead outside the classroom affect what happens inside the classroom. When we talked about their responses, it was clear that they wanted the pressures of their daily lives taken into account and that their "performance" in class could not be separated from those concerns.

It occurred to me that we could try to set some class goals that would respond to their needs and then use them as criteria for evaluating the class. Everyone seemed to like this idea, so I suggested that we write our goals as resolutions and used the opportunity to teach the use of the future tense "will" to make promises. We divided the lists up into teacher resolutions, student resolutions, and whole group resolutions, and then tried to come up with concrete responses to the listed items.

Teacher Resolutions:
- I will try to be a good teacher
- I will try to be a good person
- I won't pressure you to learn but I will pressure you to try to learn

Student Resolutions:
- We will try to pay attention
- We will try to forget our problems
- We will ask questions if we don't understand
- We will try to make time

Whole Group Resolutions:
- We will all try to make the class friendly and interesting
- We won't laugh at people
- We will learn things in class that will help us solve our problems

As I look back I see that it would have been better to more clearly define the goals (e.g., what is a "good teacher"?, etc.), but in a certain way the specific goals don't matter. What's important is that students had explored their own learning needs and set their own objectives that are as important as narrower linguistic goals. Clearly, this list did not exhaust the goals that each of us had for ourselves or the group. But this first attempt to build a student-defined evaluation helped us broaden our notions of what should be evaluated, by whom, and why. We returned to it periodically throughout the cycle to assess our personal and group progress and, finding some aims too general to evaluate, the students decided to make more precise objectives next cycle. Our teacher/student roles had already shifted.

Andy Nash worked with the Family Literacy Project as a curriculum specialist and as a teacher at El Centro del Cardenal in Boston. (1989)

PERFORMANCE TESTING

By Shelley Ruocco

First published October 1985

Students smiling when they have completed a test? Students praising a test for showing them what they had learned to do? Students comparing strategies they had used during the tests...and laughing? Students smiling and saying, "Hey teacher, that test was very good."?

Impossible, you say? We would have said so, too, until we administered our first performance test to the intermediate ESL class at Jamaica Plain Community School. These students discovered the amount of English they had mastered and expressed feelings of increased self-worth. The remarkably positive response of the students during and after this test is an experience we believe to be well worth sharing with other teachers. Hopefully they and their students will discover the positive advantages of using performance testing.

We chose performance testing of a recently completed competency for three major reasons. First, we wanted to avoid a paper and pencil test which might disadvantage those students with poor reading and writing skills. Second, we wanted students to realize that what they had learned was directly applicable to solving everyday problems and achieving certain goals. With performance tests students "perform" what they have learned within the context of situations they are likely to encounter in everyday occurences. Finally, we wanted a test which would make students feel good about themselves and lower their test anxiety. We hoped that performance testing would achieve these goals. We were pleasantly surprised with the positive results.

The students who took this test had just completed a competency on "Oral Instructions" which encompassed both giving and following directions between locations and following on-the-job instructions to complete a task. For one part of the test of this competency, we asked each student to select a teacher's name from a hat. They were told that the teacher they had selected had left them a message on that teacher's office door. Each student then had to ask the tester, who was in another room, for the directions to their teacher's office, where an envelope was taped on the door. After clarifying as much as they wished, each student retrieved an envelope and returned it to the tester. If the sealed envelope they retrieved, when opened by the tester, contained the same name the student had drawn from the hat, the student passed the test.

We designed this test format to represent, as nearly as possible, real-life experiences. As in real-life situations, students needed to ask clearly, listen carefully, clarify what they did not understand, and remember what they had heard long enough to walk to another location and complete the task.

When students returned to the class after the test, some entered the room waving the envelope over their head like a prize. Others discussed how they got sufficient clarification from the tester and what they did when they reached the floor where the envelopes were taped. They laughed together as a few students discussed how they had forgotten part of the instructions and walked around lost for a while. Many students stated that they enjoyed the test so much that they thought of it as more of a game than a test. Even those students who failed the test the first time appeared relaxed and willing to take the test over.

The value of a performance test, in our view, is not only the students' successful use of the language but also the reinforcement of positive self-image. They saw themselves as in control of their new language, manipulating it for a definite purpose and showing them, in concrete terms, what they could now accomplish, which only a month or so ago would have been impossible. They found success, not in an abstract grade on a paper, but rather in the solution of real-life problems through the use of their new language.

Shelly Ruocco teaches ESL at the Jamaica Plain Community School's Adult Learning Program. (1985)

Staff Development

Teachers Visiting Teachers: An Experiment in Classroom Observation

By Lenore Balliro

First published January 1989

For a week in November, my work as the ESL Resource Specialist at the A.L.R.I. took me to the Cardinal Cushing Center as part of a teacher observation, cross-visitation project. Throughout the week, I substitute-taught ESL classes while teachers were released to observe the teaching of their colleagues. At the end of the week we met as a group to discuss the experiment. The following is a description of the event with some reflection about implications for other programs.

The Idea

The idea for cross-visitations at the Cardinal Cushing Center emerged from an initial meeting I had with the staff earlier in the term. This meeting, one of the many I scheduled with programs when I first came on board as part of the A.L.R.I. staff, was held to discuss teachers' interests and needs for the coming year. Underlying the requests for materials and various kinds of information relating to ESL was the pervasive need that adult educators often express to do more "teacher sharing" among themselves, to share resources and to explore teaching and learning with each other on a regular basis. One teacher in the program noted that, while she attended workshops on ESL methodology from time to time, she had never actually seen her own colleagues teach.

After reflecting on the expressed needs of the teachers, I proposed a project, limited in scope, where I could facilitate cross-visitations among teachers. From my point of view, the experiment would serve at least two purposes: First, teachers could share direct experience of their classroom practice with each other and reflect upon the assumptions that guide their practice. Second, I could move toward my own goal of providing more varied kinds of assistance to Boston programs. In addition to the more traditional workshops and consulting, I could begin to facilitate a more process-oriented, teacher-based approach to staff de-

velopment. The expertise of teachers could be shared among themselves; I would be there to help set it in motion.

Generating Questions

About a week before the observations took place, we met to define what we might be doing and how we'd be doing it. In organizing this part of the process, I was informed by a number of sources: Dixie Goswami's *Reclaiming the Classroom: Teacher Research as an Agency for Social Change*, Frederick Erickson's monograph *Qualitative Methods in Research on Teaching* and notes from Susan Lytle and Marilyn Cochran-Smith on Teacher Research, delivered at the Fall, 1988, Boston University conference on Language and Literacy.

First, we asked: Do we all want to participate in the observations, and if so, why? No one was required to take part, and not everyone did. Also, teachers chose who they wanted to observe based on their own reasons. Second, we asked: What do we want to find out by observing each other? To frame the observations, teachers generated some questions they had about teaching practice. Two sets of questions emerged: questions the observer posed (what the observer wanted to find out by visiting another classroom) and questions the teacher being observed posed (what the observed teacher wanted to find out about his or her own teaching).

We decided that each teacher would make a short list of questions he or she would like the observer to watch for in the classroom. During the week, the teacher could engage in some self-reflection based on these questions as another way to share insights about the observations. We also recognized that while the questions would provide some structure for the observations, we didn't want to be limited by them; rather, we recognized that unexpected observations might prove the most interesting. The actual process, as it turned out, was not all linear; the two sets of questions merged at times, and the unexpected led to interesting and revealing discussions.

Some of the questions teachers raised reflected concerns far greater in scope than "What can I do that's fun and new on Monday morning?" Some of these questions included:

- How is the first language used in the class? When does the teacher go back to English after using the first language?
- When do teachers transition from oral discussion to literacy? How much literacy work is being done, and how?
- How much does the teacher set the agenda for the class, and how much do students? The questions themselves, born out of particular experiences teachers had in the classroom, raised possibilities for further exploration beyond our week-long experiment.

We briefly discussed methods for observation and decided that we would do the following: 1) inform students about what was going on beforehand; and 2) take notes based on questions and other things that seemed noteworthy, so we'd have specifics to share during feedback. We also clearly established that the purpose of doing the observations was for exploration, not evaluation.

Observing

On the first day of the week we set aside to conduct cross-visitations, I spent the morning observing each of the teachers for whom I'd be substituting. The purpose for this was to provide a context for the lessons I'd be doing in those classes. At the end of the day, teachers met with me to provide guidelines for the classes. They allowed, and in some cases encouraged me to experiment with and adapt their ideas or even to discard them if the situation in class suggested that. The collaboration that took place at this level—between two teachers (and sometimes more, if another teacher dropped in and joined the discussion) talking about how to follow through with an idea for a lesson, each drawing from different yet overlapping strategies, resources, experiences—provided a rich exchange I hadn't anticipated as part of my substituting role.

On the second day, teachers began visiting each other's classes. Certainly, a great deal of teacher sharing, both formal and informal, took place throughout the week related to the observations. For example, teachers who were paired for cross-visitations met with each other after observations to share insights based on the guiding questions and other interesting specifics. But there was also a kind of rippling effect among the staff as a whole. Before, in between, and after classes, teachers were sharing their experiences with each other, not just between pairs. They shared materials (Where'd you get that book you were using today? Can I borrow it?) They shared concerns (How did your follow-up lesson go to yesterday's class?) They shared frustrations (Today didn't go as well as yesterday.) They also shared strategies and experiences and solutions. While it's true that some of the dialogue can be attributed to the normal discussions teachers in any agency share with each other (that is, talk about their work), what seemed different here was that teachers had a specific context for their discussions, a context that prompted questions, illustrated ideas, provided points of departure for further dialogue. Too, teachers lingered after classes were over to follow through with some of the discussions that were initiated during the day.

Outcomes

There were at least two kinds of outcomes as a result of our week: for teachers and for me as a resource person. We met as a group on the Friday of that week to reflect on what happened and to suggest possible follow-ups.

First, teachers seemed to be in agreement that the experiment indeed had value even though it was so short term. "It's good to have someone draw you out about what you do," one teacher noted. Another teacher reflected on the issue of trust. Because she was observing a trusted colleague, she was more open to a teaching style different from her own. She admitted that she was less judgmental and more willing to ask questions about the choices her colleague had made.

For example, in the class she observed, her colleague was recording the student's language on newsprint lying flat on the table rather than hanging up on the blackboard or wall. The teacher's first reaction was "Aren't you supposed to put it up on the wall for the students to read?" But instead of dismissing the alternative approach as wrong, she asked the teacher about her choice. The teacher responded, "When you raised that question 'why,' I really had to stop and think about it. If you hadn't raised that question, I wouldn't have been aware of that particular thing about my teaching." From this unexpected observation, an interesting discussion resulted about the connection between literacy and orality—one of the guiding questions raised in the initial meeting. Further, the same teacher mentioned that the experience had value for her because she was able to see in action the methods, ideas, materials, and approaches that she had only heard her colleagues talk about.

Some of the outcomes related specifically to methodology. For example, within the context of the newsprint discussion, the language experience approach to literacy was discussed, and variations shared. Another teacher was excited because she observed a different way of teaching pronunciation—an area she never felt very motivated to spend much time on. The next day she tried the strategy (having students correct each other's pronunciation) in her class and reported success.

The sharing that happened that week was not limited, however, to the exchange of techniques. Discussion about observations led to questions, questions led to clarification of assumptions, philosophies and ideologies were explored.

Also, sometime between the initial meeting and the carrying-out of this project, the ESL staff decided to devote a portion of their staff meetings to teacher sharing. This became another way that teachers could devote time to issues of pedagogy.

Teachers did feel, though, that there had been limitations to the project. They agreed that it would have been helpful to discuss beforehand what they'd be observing. Without a larger context (what came before, what would come after) it was sometimes difficult to get a sense of how that specific lesson fit into a longer sequence of instruction. They also suggested that it might be helpful to continue the process every month or so on a more limited basis (for example, one cross-visitation between two teachers).

Outcomes for the ESL Resource Person

The week had outcomes for me as well. It got me back into the classroom, so I could re-experience some of the "messiness" of the teaching process as opposed to the "set-up" of doing workshops. I also got to try out a few new ideas and materials I generated and then make them available as resources for other teachers. I was able to get a clearer sense of some of the resource needs the program and teachers had. Just by being there, I could provide more specific follow-up references and resources as a result of observations, discussions, and requests.

But in addition to providing resources, I felt that I collected many myself: teachers shared their approaches, suggestions, and experiences with me, which allowed me to add to my own repertoire and, in turn, to share more effectively with other practitioners. Further, I was able to note similarities among programs and point them out. For example, one of the teachers in an upper level class had been teaching a series of classes based on an article by Mike Barnicle of the *Boston Globe*. A recent project at Mujeres Unidas also focused on an article by Barnicle. Both classes resulted in writing letters to him and to the editor and trying to contact Barnicle in some way. There seemed to be an interesting follow-up possibility if teachers or students from these two programs decided to work together on a similar project.

The Bigger Picture

Cross-visitations and teacher observations are not a new idea in teacher education. Teacher-based classroom research (also called action research, qualitative research, naturalistic research) is gaining in popularity among educators. However, in adult education, especially in community-based programs, there are so many constraints working against teachers that it's often hard enough just to meet the expectations of teaching their own classes. Rarely are teachers encouraged, or allowed, to step back from their practice and talk with other practitioners about what they do. Staff meetings are common, but are usually consumed by "nuts and bolts" or "housekeeping" issues—issues that are not insignificant but which often impede discussion about teaching and learning.

However, because the field of adult literacy and language acquisition is evolving, teachers can provide a tremendous contribution to the field and should be encouraged to do so. Many of the questions that adult educators are posing (in addition to the ones mentioned earlier)—questions about the nature of learning disabilities, about adults who simply don't seem to progress, about the nature of literacy and THE BEST WAY TO TEACH IT—are ones that can frame further investigation, often by teachers themselves.

Implications

Teacher observations are one way that teachers' experiences and reflection upon those experiences are validated. They help to combat teacher alienation and increase morale among staff. They can encourage the exchange of effective teaching approaches which may lead to transformation of teaching practices. They may be modified in scope to meet the interests and needs of various programs. Variations on the model described here are endless. Teachers can visit other programs for visitations, students can visit each other's classes, collaborative teaching models could be explored. In the case of the Cardinal Cushing experiment, it didn't cost anything to conduct the project. There were no additional burdens placed on teachers or the program. Teacher observations took place during normal work hours, with pay. There was no need to pay for a substitute teacher, since I received my A.L.R.I. salary for my participation. In this modest project, the nature of "technical assistance" took on a slightly different perspective. It's one that the A.L.R.I. and its resource staff have been working toward; it's an extension of the teacher-sharing workshops and the teacher-sharing file. It rests on some assumptions that teachers have a lot to say about what they do and that they want to do it better.

Other ESL or adult literacy programs might be interested in experimenting with teacher observations or some variation on them. If the A.L.R.I. staff can assist such a project, let us know.

Lenore Balliro is the ESL Coordinator at the A.L.R.I. (1989)

AT THE Y: A PROGRAM-BASED STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

By Shelley Bertolino

First published September 1990

For ten weeks, in the spring of 1990, I acted as the facilitator of a staff development project in the adult ESL program at the International Services Branch of the Greater Boston YMCA. The director of our program, David Norman, had received inquiries from teachers on alternative teaching techniques and new classroom ideas. He enthusiastically took advantage of a modest amount of grant money made available by SABES (the state's System for Adult Basic Education Support) to initiate a curriculum development/teacher-sharing project.

David asked me to work with the teachers to improve the existing curriculum which consists of grammar and survival topics and to work on injecting some new life into some of the teaching techniques being used in the classrooms. We both agreed from the onset that the course of the project should be driven by the teachers' input and concerns and not by me, working in isolation on overhauling the curriculum. After all, it was for their benefit, so it should be coming from them. With these guidelines in mind, I sent out a memo announcing the first teacher sharing sessions. These would not be mandatory, and teachers would be paid for their time.

As with most new projects, there were hurdles to surmount. A major one was simply working out the logistics of when everyone could meet. Since the majority of the teachers work full-time during the day, with some of them teaching Monday and Wednesday evenings and others teaching Tuesday and Thursday evenings, there was only one week night we all had off—Friday. After some failed attempts at holding meetings right before classes, a time needed for class

preparation, photocopying, and so on, we agreed upon every other Friday night from 6 to 7 pm. Even though it cut into the weekend, we all felt it better to meet at a time when we were more relaxed and not rushing off to teach.

From the first session I learned that, on a philosophical level, we were coming from very different places. The training I received as a graduate student at UMass/Boston was shaped by the teachings of Malcolm Knowles, Paolo Freire, and others who promote the ideas of student-centered classrooms, active learning and student-generated curricula, rather than the more traditional grammar-based practices. The challenge to me was to share my educational philosophies without imposing them. I realized if I came on too strong with my agenda that I might risk alienating my colleagues and, besides, the idea of the project was to use their concerns as a starting point. Thus, I decided that if, in the course of four meetings, we could work on some of the basic principles of second language acquisition theory and of adult learning theory on providing a meaningful context for learning, that would be quite enough for starters. No burning of grammar books yet.

The meetings themselves can best be described as informal rap sessions. It was interesting for me to see how the conversations sustained themselves, how naturally one person's comments fed another, and how in acting as a group, bringing our collective experiences together, the sum was greater than the parts. A wealth of ideas flowed from these conversations and for some of the quieter participants the mere act of listening was invaluable as it provided a point of comparison between what they were doing in the classroom and what others were doing.

One of the concerns that came out during our meetings was the need for some systematic way in which to share materials. We decided to create a file system whereby contributions of successful activities could be put in a file drawer for everyone's use. Also, the teachers wanted a book list of appropriate texts according to each level. Here I found an appropriate context in which to introduce some of my graduate school ideas. Along with the book list, I presented a list of non-traditional published materials appropriate for adult ESL students and guidelines for using such texts from Elsa Auerbach's curriculum guide entitled *Making Meaning, Making Sense.*

When the need for reading ideas came from the teachers (i.e., became a "teacher issue"), the lists and ideas on how to teach a reading became all the more meaningful. Thus, it was an illustration of one of the most important principles of adult learning theory—their interest provided a meaningful context for learning. From there we went on to discuss how to contextualize grammar points and student issues. We discussed teacher-generated stories and teacher/student generated stories using the language experience approach (LEA).

Although we did not adopt a new curriculum for the program or even really change the existing one, a simple but important point was conveyed: Do not be afraid of veering from the curriculum or the textbook; in other words, teach the students, not the book. Perhaps the most powerful aspect of these meetings was that they forced everyone to take a look at what they were doing—to reflect on their teaching practices. It is from this reflection that we choose to focus on different teaching styles, styles that might enhance our effectiveness. So often this most important step gets left out of the teaching experience. We plan and execute the lesson, but we do not always consider how it went.

As I leave the YMCA and this project for a teaching job in Mexico, I am left wondering how much longer the Friday night meetings will last. Maybe now that friendships have been formed and confidences built, beginning a new component of mutual classroom observations would be an appropriate direction in which to take a staff development project such as this. Also, in my opinion, it is clear that the progress that we made was dependent on the paid time of a staff developer. This demonstrates the importance of adequate funding for teacher training and development in adult education programs.

Shelley Bertolino taught ESL at the Greater Boston YMCA, International Services Branch, and is now teaching in Mexico. (1990)

Teacher Concerns

Adult Literacy Teacher Concerns

By Kimberly Gerould

First published April 1986

Lack of job security, no benefits for part-timers, little access to training—these were a few of the issues discussed at the February 5th meeting of the Boston Network for Alternative and Adult Education, a group of educators who meet monthly to talk about a wide range of concerns. The ABE and ESL teachers, counselors and administrators who attended this meeting represented several programs, including the Community Learning Center, the International Institute, Project SCALE, Jobs for Youth, City Roots, Casa del Sol, and the YMCA, to name a few. The February 5th meeting, sponsored by the CLC in Cambridge, focused on employment issues.

On a survey sent out prior to the workshop, those who responded identified the following priority issues: idea-sharing, career advancement, access to training, pay, staff support, curriculum development, teacher certification, and job security. Based on the interests of those who actually attended, we decided to break into three groups to discuss: 1) opportunities for idea-sharing and in-service training; 2) certification; and 3) working conditions.

The first group agreed that there are increasing opportunities for teachers to share ideas and resources through such forums as the Boston Network and the Adult Literacy Resource Institute, but that staff development is made more difficult by the part-time status of many teachers, the high rates of staff turnover, the various time demands placed on all staff, the small size of many programs, and the lack of certainty regarding the future for both programs and staff.

The second group discussed issues around teacher certification and more formal training opportunities for adult education teachers. They felt that certification was not generally a burning issue at this time, with a few exceptions, but that any certification policy developed in the future should truly reflect the standards we believe in. Most felt that a teacher's experience and practical training greatly outweighed a formal degree or certificate. Standards for teacher training and access to training emerged as the important issues.

A small group, convened by Mary Jane Schmitt at the Community Learning Center, will meet to discuss these issues and to develop a list of training resources and opportunities, to be published by the ALRI.

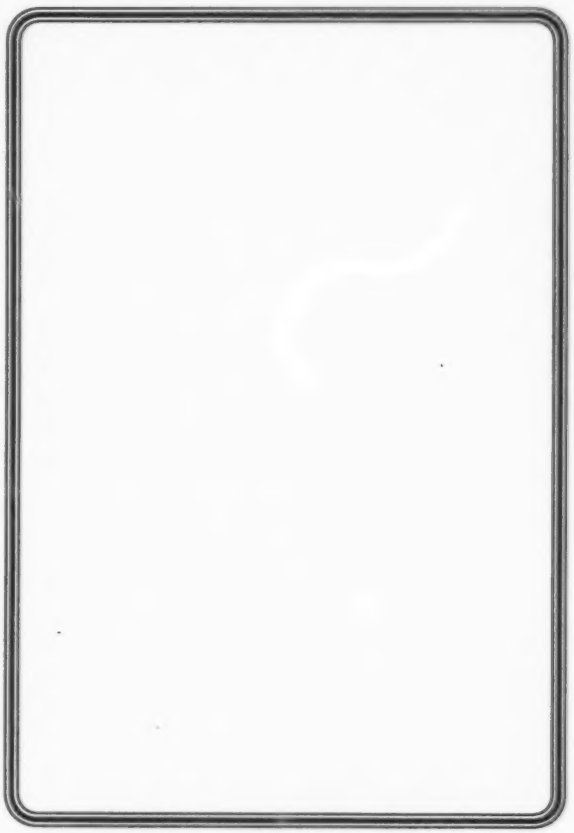
The hottest topic of the afternoon was job conditions. We all felt that it is crucial to begin seriously addressing these issues, not only for our own security as workers, but also to be able to ensure the continuation of high quality adult education. A major problem for both full- and part- time adult educators is the lack of job security due to year-to-year funding or the dependency on fluctuating enrollments and tuition. This creates insecurity for both individual teachers and overall programs, making long-range planning and staff development difficult. Our programs are particularly vulnerable to politicians in city, state and federal government, and, as of yet, adult educators and our students are not a political force. In relation to this insecurity and political vulnerability, many people expressed resentment about the large pay disparity between K-12 public school teachers and adult educators.

Another major problem for most adult education programs is the predominant use of part-timers. To a degree, this is inevitable, given our programs' night schedules. Much of the use of part-timers, however, is seen as a strategy for programs to cut costs. Part-timers often don't receive benefits and are not paid for preparation time or for attending meetings or staff training sessions, thus decreasing their already low wages. Part-timers are asked to do work similar to full-timers but with inequitable pay and benefits. As a result, both part-time workers and the programs suffer. High turnover is one of the consequences of such exploitation. Part-timers also don't receive as much training and usually don't participate in decision-making, thus lessening their sense of identification with an organization. This lack of communication and continuity can translate into lowered morale and hurt the quality of teaching.

We looked at various ways organizations have tried to deal with these problems and brainstormed other possible solutions. Many people felt that programs need to find ways to create more full-time positions. There are other steps, however, that could offset the disadvantages of working part-time: pay part-timers to attend meetings and in-service training sessions, pay them for preparation time and sick days, provide a higher hourly rate to compensate for the lack of health benefits, and look for ways to provide partial benefits for part-timers. The International Institute in Boston has recently enacted some measures like these in order to upgrade part-time positions. Unionizing is another option that could benefit both full- and part-timers; for example, Project SCALE in Somerville has been unionized since 1977. We agreed that it was important to continue to discuss our working conditions and seek creative solutions; Judy Hikes of the Community Learning Center will be convening a group to continue this discussion.

In order to be able to advocate for ourselves as workers and for the field that we work in, however, we will have to organize ourselves on a larger scale. Despite the current popularity in government circles of talking about adult illiteracy, consciousness is still very low about the urgent need, not simply to maintain, but to expand programs for adult education and to create decent working conditions for the staffs. It is our task to do this consciousness-raising among politicians and the public. In order to be heard and felt, we must have a unified voice and political organization. The Boston Network meeting took a step in that direction. There are also other groups that are discussing these issues, such as MATSOL and a newly-formed Politics of Literacy group. We need eventually to coordinate our efforts and strive to make the field of adult education viable and secure for both its workers and students.

Kim Gerould is a teacher and counselor at the Community Learning Center and is ESL Coordinator at Centro Presente, both in Cambridge. (1986)



Organizing an Adult Ed. Union

By Rhonda Seidman, Lisa Schwartz, and Barbara Neumann

First published March 1988

Last spring a group of alternative and adult education teachers began meeting informally to address a variety of issues related to our work and our working conditions. As common themes—and problems—became apparent, we decided to explore unionizing as a strategy for effecting change. We have since named our group: Adult/Alternative Educators Interested in Organizing a Union (AEIOU). Following a recent meeting, three of us felt compelled to write down some of our thoughts about this ongoing process. What follows are three different, personal accounts of our experience and perceptions of the union organizing effort in adult/alternative education.

* * * * * *

Originally I became involved with the union to deal with working conditions. For the first time in my life, I had found work that I felt was meaningful and important and I felt how unjust it was that I should have to work 12 hour days, piecing together part-time jobs that did not even have benefits. And then have a job end in the spring and worry about paying the rent over the summer. Purely selfish reasons, so I thought. What about the students? What about the quality of education? What about what goes on in the classroom? Am I a person who is thinking solely of myself? Well, perhaps I am and why shouldn't I have a job that I'm not so burned out from? And we talk of empowering our students?

So I continued forward with this idea of a union still not knowing quite what it meant, how we would do it, but feeling it was important if only to get relief from my 12-hour days which often seemed so oppressive. Full of self-doubt, continuously thinking all the time, "Well, you have chosen this. This is your choice. It's your fault. You have created your own situation. Stop complaining." But still I felt so trapped and isolated. All the time.

So, we proceeded. We had small meetings, sent out leaflets and talked to people. And it was interesting to hear people's concerns, ideas, problems. What is going on with all of us? People talked of administrative problems, performance standards, funding sources, job security. How do we do this anyways? Yes, we want students to be participators in the world, to speak out, to change their lives. But how do we go about making changes in our own work? Nowhere to go? And what control do we have over what happens in the classroom? Who shapes the nature of our programs? Don't we actually run them based on fear? Are we not afraid to take some degree of control? Am I not? Are we all not troubled and afraid to talk about what goes on in our classrooms? Is open dialogue between teachers so clouded and confused because we always seem so puzzled by: How do we teach? What do we teach? And what are we doing anyways? Are these not issues we face all the time every day?

When I started teaching an ABE class, I felt lost. I went to various different people and programs in search of a great oracle to tell me what to do. I was looking for a "road map," although I can now say, thank god no one gave it to me. I found people as afraid as I was to talk about what goes on in their classes.

At the last union meeting we looked up the definition of the word *union*—"to come together and unite as a whole." Do we not need to come together? Are we all not confronting similar issues in our own corners? This is one person who has felt that the personal development and growth over the last months has made me realize the necessity of unity. This evolution from thinking of the union solely as this deliverer of peace from my sometimes painfully long schedule has come to realizing there is a larger meaning to all of this. After talking and listening to people's concerns I feel the union may be a way for us to share our concerns with potency so that we can move forward with certainty and strength. I believe our "silence and invisibility" will keep us passive and weak.

—Rhonda Seidman

JOURNAL ENTRY—FEBRUARY 6, 1988

Last night, sitting around the kitchen table working on union stuff, I was thinking: this is the way it ought to be. Everybody pitches in and we do what needs to be done. We make a flyer, or we put together a mailing list, or design a questionnaire or plan a workshop. Somebody gets things going, but everybody else isn't "waiting" for the meeting to start—it just starts. There are details and ideas to discuss. Things happen—without bosses or quasi-boss facilitators—and week by week all of us, I think, are changing in unforeseen ways. True, true, true. Who knows how or why?

Down side: emotion haggles with thought and action, and emotion could win. (Dangerous. Why?)

Last night I came precariously close to "losing it." Yelled at Lisa for "no reason." No reason (of course) = every shred of class anger I've accumulated over 37 years. Lately I've been feeling more and more the truth of that old phrase "the hidden injuries of class," the real, insidious assaults that nobody pays attention to in our oh-so-liberal workplaces. Realization: a friend (of course) in loving struggle could utter the precise, innocent, unselfconscious words that unleash a wholly justifiable, not clearly targeted rage. Confusion prevails. Is this where I want to be? Is this effort really important (to me personally, and in some "larger" sense) or not? What is it about "union"—versus "network," "coalition," "committee," "group"—that renders possibilities, even starts to bend my own entrenched cynicism?

Looking back, I remember we came together because of many-levelled dissatisfactions with work: because we worked long hours for meager pay; because we were beginning to feel more like bureaucrats than teachers; because we wanted to be *better* teachers and couldn't find any real support for the kind of teaching we wanted to do; because we were isolated, frustrated, and too often compromised. We each had our particular issues. We started to talk about unionizing because working through "existing channels" had (surprise, surprise) gone nowhere. The act of organizing a union seemed more daring, more radical, more *real* than all the other attempts at change we had made over the past several years. An adult and alternative education workers' union began to seem like a viable solution to all sorts of problems.

But the union as "means to an end" isn't the whole story. It's not as though we are going to "decide" to "have" a union, and then this union entity is an affluent dad who gives us our well-earned hefty allowance. Insight: this union effort is about the here-and-now as much as it's about the future. A site of struggle that accepts and respects who I am? My working-class, dyke, revolutionary, single-mother sensibilities needed here? (Valued?) I wonder. But mostly, yes. Something's going on here. Flow of ideas and action, the way we talk and listen to each other, argue/cooperate, change, essentially care. This is gradually precious reality. Not mere ideal. (My reality or everybody's? Need to know.)

What will happen with all this? Could easily sour as the numbers grow, clashes intensify, people get tired. Now it feels like there is plenty of commitment, energy, ability...

—Barbara Neumann

I do things on dares. Frustrated, big complainer I am. I don't like meetings, but I'm dying to hear what other folks are doing with students. Not what they *want* to do, or feel they should be doing, but what their daily classroom feels like, sounds like—what actually happens. But this kind of discussion—no matter how much "sharing" occurs—never happens at meetings. Actually, it did happen once and 50 people showed up on a Saturday morning (even me) to keep it going. Instead we spend a very polite 45 minutes introducing ourselves and then 6 people—mostly program operators—argued about the right way to address issues. I stopped going. I know—easily frustrated. Big complainer. Do nothing. Get pissed off. A lot.

So it's the summer and I'm pissed off again, complaining on the phone (the best place to complain) and I'm complaining about the recent attempts to find out if other teachers want to unionize—in other words, complain and act on it—and my fellow complainer says, "Well, why don't *you* help do it?" It was a dare. So I did it.

When I started teaching, I thought I was God's gift to education. My lesson plans were elegant, my ideas fun and interesting and I found out on the very first day that I didn't know anything. That first day stretched out to two years. And I still have that "fraud" feeling—that horrible suspicion/awareness that I'm getting away with murder in the classroom. But the union meetings have given me a context in which to interpret those feelings. Meeting with AEIOU members has taught me, very poignantly, how like our students we really are. Like them, we read the daily "text" of our teaching experiences without the context crucial to good comprehension. Like them, when we come up against experiences we can't interpret, we blame ourselves or get angry and stop. We feel powerless, like our students. We do not come to the text of our teaching experiences with the experience or knowledge we need because, in our case, that context comes from *each other*. We cannot do this work in a library or before class. And we cannot do it solely through "sharing" conferences or curriculum development or community meetings or armed encounters with funders or legislators because *we are the context* that illuminates the text. We—our knowledge of problems and possibilities—are the context we need so that we can interpret the meanings of our work. This unionizing business shows me that figuring out better teaching methods must be linked with a critical awareness—a contextualization—of our actual teaching conditions. We can't do it alone and it can't happen without each other.

—Lisa Schwartz

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